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DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A CASE STUDY

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Distance education for professional development: a case study

Carol Miller

Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between distance education, adult learning and professional development for special education in the context of teachers' work with pupils with speech and language difficulties.

Responses from students and tutors in three cohorts of a distance education course for teachers of pupils with speech and language difficulties are analysed and conclusions drawn concerning future practice in the light of changing professional needs. Qualitative methods, using questionnaires, interviews and systemic thinking activities, generate data for the analysis of course process in relation to student support, content and impact on practice.

The study proposes a socio-technical systems model for planning, management and evaluation of professional development by distance education. This approach recognises that specific technical and organisational characteristics will interact with social and psychological aspects of participants' personal and professional lives.

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Publications

The following papers have been published in association with the development of this thesis:

Miller, C. (1991a) *Project to develop a distance-learning course for teachers of children with speech and language disorders: final report to the Department of Education and Science*. School of Education, the University of Birmingham/Department of Education and Science. (see Introduction to Part 2)

Miller, C. (1991b) The needs of teachers of children with speech and language disorders. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy* 7: 2 179-191. (See Introduction to Part 2)

Miller, C. (1995) In-depth interviewing by telephone: some practical considerations. *Evaluation and Research in Education* Vol 9: 1 29-38 (see Chapter 4)

Miller, C. (1995) Professional development and distance education: the workplace as part of the system. In D Sewart (Ed) *One world many voices: quality in open and distance learning*. International Council for Distance Education/Open University. Vol 1 315-318 (See Chapter 8)

Miller, C. (1996) Relationships between teachers and speech-language therapists: influencing practice by distance education. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy* Vol 12: 1 29-38 (See Chapter 8)

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with the evaluation of a course. The course is examined as a case study which highlights the relationship between distance education, adult learning and teachers' professional development for special education. The specific context for the study is an innovative approach to the professional development of teachers working with pupils identified as having speech and language difficulties. Until the development of the course, there were few opportunities for teachers to gain expertise in this area of special education.

The evaluation aims to explore distance education and its effectiveness for teachers' professional development and to look at professional issues in the field of speech and language difficulties in education.

Research questions

In the initial stages, an investigation of needs of teachers working with language difficulties was undertaken in order to develop appropriate content for the course. Following this, an ongoing process of feedback and evaluation assesses the relevance of the professional development activity and enables it to be adjusted to changes in individual and group needs. The research is thus based on an assumption that a course for professional development is a dynamic system in which all elements interact. In selecting distance education as a new approach to professional development, the particular interactions of features of distance education with the characteristics of the day-to-day work of the professionals, were deemed worthy of close scrutiny. The thesis is therefore grounded in the data which emerged from the evaluation and initially, a broad research question was formulated:

What are the main processes in the development of the innovative approach of distance education for professional development in special education?

The research took place and the course continues amid a changing scene of education and a second question arose from the study's particular context. A professional development activity is also part of a wider system, comprising aspects of teachers' personal and professional lives. It is assumed that teachers working in the field of speech and language difficulties need special knowledge and skill. The assumption has implications, not only for the teachers, but for speech and language therapists, professionals who are also involved with children with speech and language difficulties. The two groups of professionals are expected to collaborate. This means that there may be effects on their interactions linked with changes resulting from the teachers' professional development. This part of the system assumed particular interest in the research and a second question became increasingly important:

What are the particular implications of the processes and outcomes of this distance education course for teachers and speech and language therapists?

Whilst a case study approach must lead to discussion about its specific characteristics, it is possible to raise more general issues and to speculate on the wider implications of this type of study. A third question addressed by the research is therefore:

How can the processes be understood for further development and evaluation of similar enterprises?

Significance of the thesis

The significance of this work may be seen in terms of its theoretical, methodological and practical contributions.

Theoretically, the study brings together perspectives on distance education and professional development and links them through systems theory. Distance teaching

and learning are now seen as important contributors to education which can serve to raise awareness of what constitutes good practice in education in general (Evans and Nation, 1989). Support for participants in a distance learning activity is critical (Holmberg, 1984) and this study explores links between distance education as a mode of professional development and students' personal lives. An interactional approach is central to the thesis and informs the developmental and evaluative aspects.

Methodologically, a qualitative approach is adopted, with questionnaires and interviews as the main tools of investigation. The interactive nature of the methods used reflects the systemic view of personal, professional and organisational activities examined in the study. The perspectives gained from the data are grounded in the views of people, who are central to this type of research. As a particular example, telephone interviewing is critically examined as an approach to accessing research collaborators who are not easily available.

In practical terms, the study is significant for the planning, management and evaluation of professional development activities. Currently, schools, education authorities and higher education providers are having to think radically about professional development. Full-time courses are no longer viable and this study suggests that their efficacy, in terms of practice, is questionable. Distance education is proposed as an effective means to professional development and the study suggests characteristics of the content and processes of a course which can impact on classroom practice. The evaluation study therefore has practical significance for the institution in which it is based and for other potential providers and consumers of similar enterprises. The study is presented at a time when there is considerable concern about reduced opportunities for teachers to undertake professional development at any level (Special Educational Needs Training Consortium, 1996).

The study considers some of the positive and negative aspects of distance education for busy practitioners. The use of a systemic, interactive approach shows the importance of considering both wider aspects of a professional environment and specific characteristics of the course itself. Additionally, features of students' personal lives are important and it is suggested that social interaction is an essential aspect of learning in this type of course. The specific example of teachers in the field of speech and language difficulties has practical application to activities in a range of other fields. The proposed use of a 'socio-technical' model provides a practical approach to development and evaluation of a variety of professional development enterprises.

The study also makes a particular contribution to the growing body of research on interprofessional collaboration, with specific reference to teachers and speech and language therapists (Daines, 1992; Wright, 1994; Newman, 1996; Roux, 1996). Increasing emphasis on inclusive education suggests that wherever possible, pupils should have their individual educational needs met in mainstream schools, with the implication that teachers and therapists should work together to this end. It is proposed that work in speech and language difficulties should utilise a combination of approaches traditionally used separately by teachers and therapists. Models of speech and language difficulties must include educational and social perspectives.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured as follows:

Part 1: Chapters 1, 2 and 3 provide the background for the study by considering literature relevant to its main themes. Chapter 4 discusses the methodology and methods of the study.

Chapter 1 sets the context of the study and outlines relevant issues in distance education and professional matters. The characteristics of distance education as an educational activity are examined and the main theoretical perspectives are explored. In particular,

there is focus on the ways in which distance education aims to promote autonomous, supported learning and is largely concerned with the needs of adult students. This provides an appropriate means to professional development and examples are given of the use of distance education for professional development in special education.

In order to explain the specific focus of content for the course, Chapter 2 considers the nature of speech and language difficulties. The rationale for the course lies in the central importance of language in education. Where children experience difficulties, either in understanding or expressing themselves through language, they can be disadvantaged in education and may therefore have special educational needs. The chapter explores the complexity of speech and language difficulties, which are viewed as a spectrum. The relative usefulness of the terms 'delay' and 'disorder' in language is explored and the chapter reviews the main incidence and prevalence studies. The models which currently dominate thinking in the field of speech and language difficulty are presented and it is suggested that these have created obstacles to effective work with pupils. In conclusion, this chapter shows that speech and language difficulties are a cause for concern and that there is a clear case for developing teachers' expertise in working with them.

Chapter 3 is concerned with professional issues and provision for pupils in the field of speech and language difficulties. The first part of the chapter reviews provision for children with speech and language difficulties showing that it is made within a range of educational settings. Advantages and disadvantages of provision in language units, special schools and mainstream education are discussed. This provides the contextual background for the course participants and provides further rationale for specialist courses for teachers. Secondly, the preparation of teachers for special education and in particular, for work with speech and language difficulties, is discussed, showing how an increasingly unsatisfactory situation has developed in which they have had few opportunities to develop skills and knowledge. Consideration is then given to whether

the employment of speech and language therapists presents potential obstacles to collaborative work between therapists and teachers because of their employment in health and education respectively.

Chapter 4 discusses methodology for an evaluative study and the methods selected for the research. The course is seen as a complex system of interrelated elements. The evaluation requires methods compatible with a systemic view. A rationale is provided for the chosen methodology of a case study of a course, examined using an action research approach, largely through a range of qualitative methods. Action research takes account of the developmental nature of the course as a 'case' and allows for ongoing evaluation to be fed back into the course and affect its subsequent development. The chapter explains the choice of questionnaires, interviews and activities as methods for the investigation of people's reactions and opinions. The use of interviews by telephone is explored in detail and is seen to be especially relevant to research in distance education.

Part 2 of the thesis presents the evaluation study and each chapter links with elements of the research questions. The introduction to this section sets the scene by briefly explaining the events leading to the decision to set up a course in response to requests from parents and teachers of children with speech and language difficulties. An outline is given of the investigation of teachers' needs undertaken to provide the basis for the course content. The course structure is outlined.

Chapter 5 considers the formal arrangements for supporting students during the course. These are based on the belief that potentially isolating characteristics of distance education are reduced and students' learning is enhanced in social settings. The chapter presents feedback on the tutorial system which endorses the view that interaction with professionals in similar circumstances is an important element in the course arrangements.

Chapters 6 and 7 present student feedback on course materials and show how and why positive and negative evaluations were made. Themes relating to pressure and stress emerged early in the evaluations. Data in Chapter 6 link these themes with particular content areas and show the importance students placed on the relevance of the course to their practice. In Chapter 7, links between theory and classroom practice are pursued further. Feedback suggested that the nature of the activities of the distance learning materials and the style of presentation could be critical to their perceived effect on teachers' practice.

The potential for distance education to impact on students' professional relationships and their work settings is the theme of Chapter 8. Activities were developed as a response to teachers' suggestions that the course played a part in their daily lives with colleagues. Students' perceptions of the effects of the course on their own and colleagues' practice are discussed, with particular emphasis on the relationships between teachers and speech and language therapists.

Chapter 9 explores some of the main themes of the evaluation through specifically focused interviews with three former students. The three case studies examine the teachers' responses to distance education and how other people were involved as they went through the course. Personal and professional relationships were important in these cases and the course was reported to have had a systemic and lasting effect.

In **Part 3** Chapter 10 draws the thesis together by reviewing its main themes and by identifying lessons to be learned from the study which might assist further research and link with future developments. The main areas of the discussion are as follows:

Students' responses to the course are complex but the perceived relevance of the course activities to practice is important. Although formal arrangements to support students

may be made by a course, many practitioners are not enabled in their studies by their employers. Stress and fatigue accompanied the learning of many of the students. In spite of this, there is considerable evidence that a distance education programme can have a positive impact on classroom practice. However, future course developers might attempt to secure the explicit support of employers and managers of course participants.

The systemic view of the course emphasises personal and professional relationships. Many of the teachers were supported in their coursework by colleagues and family members. In turn, colleagues gained from their own involvement with the course. Speech and language therapists are amongst teachers' colleagues in this area of education and the course plays a part in their working relationships. It appears to have positive effects on their collaboration and enhances understanding between the two professional groups.

The course highlights the importance of educational perspectives on speech and language difficulties and suggests that traditional models have not been conducive to collaborative practice. An alternative approach, which stresses the interaction of traditional models with educational and social frameworks, is proposed. Such a view would further support collaboration between professionals in special education.

Finally, the discussion suggests that within a systems framework, a sociotechnical systems approach is a useful model for planning, management and evaluation of professional development by distance education. This approach recognises that any professional development activity will have specific technical and organisational characteristics and that these will interact with social and psychological aspects of participants' personal and professional lives. Whilst there are general conclusions about the outcomes of a course, there are also many individual, complex perspectives which must be recognised in a fair evaluation.

PART 1

CHAPTER 1: DISTANCE EDUCATION, ADULT LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

This chapter presents a background to distance education which characterises the professional development opportunity evaluated in this study. Features of distance education are discussed, providing a rationale for its use for professional development for teachers. As in the present study, distance education has often been a response to identified needs or to particular social or political circumstances. However, most of the processes of distance education feature in traditional forms of education and indeed, may draw attention to the need to further develop these processes in more conventional teaching and learning. Distance education has, in some settings, separated the roles of subject-focused academics from educational designers or technologists. Some of the advantages and disadvantages of this approach are discussed, providing a rationale for the integration of these roles in a small-scale, focused professional development programme for specialist teachers.

Theories of adult learning which emphasise need, motivation and autonomous study can be clearly linked with aspects of distance education and in this chapter, the place of distance education in the education of teachers is discussed. Because of its flexibility and ability to reach large numbers, distance education has often been used abroad in the initial preparation of teachers in conditions of stringency where development of education has been a pressing need. More recently in the UK too, distance education has begun to provide for aspiring teachers. The chapter briefly reviews developments in distance education for teachers in special education, where the University of Birmingham has been an important innovator. Overall, the chapter develops the hypothesis that distance education, because of its emphasis on flexible, supported, independent study, is particularly suitable as a mode of study for teachers with busy professional and personal lives.

Distance education

The term distance education covers a variety of teaching and learning activities in which, for the main part, the learner is separated from the educational institution or from the tutor. Formerly, 'correspondence education' might have been an appropriate term but this would imply that print was the main medium used. Holmberg (1989) notes that the term 'distance education' has gradually been adopted in the UK since the early 1970's and that a degree of formal recognition of the term came in 1982 when the International Council for Correspondence Education adopted the name, International Council for Distance Education. Distance education employs media in many forms and to varying extents, including written and recorded materials, radio, television, telephone and information technology. It is increasingly recognised that a face-to-face component enhances its effectiveness. It is found from primary to post-graduate levels and is successful in a range of contexts through traditionally 'academic' courses to practice-based programmes which aim to develop workplace skills. Peters, an early researcher in distance education described it as 'industrialised education', because of its characteristic reliance, in part, on production lines of materials for study and its 'quasi-industrial administrative procedures' (Peters, 1967, reprinted in Keegan, 1994). In spite of this however, Keegan also believes that whilst it is a more industrialised form of education, it is one in which 'educational activities are dominant'.

The industrialised view is also tempered by Holmberg's belief (1984) that there is an essential element of personal interaction or 'guided didactic conversation' in successful distance education. Holmberg's views have been an important influence on the style of materials in distance education. The development of study materials encourages interactive processes which engage the student in simulated conversation and active thinking. Personal relationships between students and those representing the institution can enhance learning and teaching because students' communication

'with tutors and other representatives of the educational institution promote emotional involvement and emotional involvement promotes learning' (Holmberg, 1991 p45).

The sole reliance on text therefore, would not be the best way of promoting students' learning. They might experience isolation and lack opportunity to engage in any form of dialogue. The development of modern distance education, like any other form of education, is challenged by the need to involve students actively in teaching and learning processes which may include dialogue with text, with a tutor and with each other.

Political and social influences on distance education

A central theme in the study of distance education has been the justification of the abandonment of interpersonal, face-to-face communication, previously considered essential for education in all civilisations. 'Crisis situations' often precipitated the development of distance education (Keegan, 1990). There frequently seems to be a view that distance education courses are a compromise alternative to traditional teaching and, as in the case of the present study, the initial impetus for development comes from a political or economic barrier to the establishment of a course. Although there has been an increase in distance courses, critics frequently start from a deficit model. 'Real' education is campus-based or 'proximal' and the priority in development is to transform information from on-campus to off-campus use (Walker 1993). This may particularly apply to dual-mode institutions with a tradition of face-to-face classes, rather than to institutions developed for distance education or to courses previously not offered on campus. Although there is now generally greater support and distance education cannot be considered new, it has been suggested that true acceptance of distance education 'will probably take decades' (Jevons, 1984 p24).

Distance education has provided important educational opportunities for those who can not or do not wish to participate in conventional provision and social and political factors

may be particularly important to the success of distance education (Perraton, 1984). In evaluation of courses, these will have implications for example, for the access and participation rates, the nature of the student groups and the organisational and funding arrangements (O'Buachalla, 1989). Each of these are relevant to the present study of a particular specialist course for the professional development of teachers. It will be shown in the next two chapters and in the Introduction to Part 2 that the development of the course was particularly affected by prevailing political, economic and social circumstances, which prevented teachers' access to a campus-based course and which created pressure for a specialist course in speech and language difficulties.

The practice and process of distance education

The Open University (OU), devoted to the practice of distance education, has been an important influence both in the UK and elsewhere in the world. Evans and Nation (1989) say that it 'captured the minds of politicians and educational administrators internationally in the 1970s' (p6) so that distance education 'is no longer a marginal activity' (p7). Around the world distance education developed with local variations and in response to local needs. Whilst some parts of the world set up single-purpose distance teaching institutions, in others 'dual-mode' institutions developed campus-based and distance courses alongside each other.

The Open University's first Vice Chancellor reported that in the early stages, when considering the UK OU's role in academic research,

'the Planning Committee ... were seized of the idea that the new innovative teaching methods of the Open University would themselves form a fascinating subject of study' (Perry, 1976 p246).

So-called applied educational scientists, at the OU in 1969, were involved in institutional research in development of the methodology of teaching. The emphasis on a separate group, now called 'educational technologists', in developing methodologies for effective teaching and learning at a distance has been significant.

Large distance teaching institutions have used course teams which include academic staff, educational technologists, designers, media representatives, administrators and support staff working intensively together, perhaps over a period of two or three years to produce course materials and their related assessment and maintenance activities. Perry (1976) believed that the

'the concept of the course team is...the most important single contribution of the Open University to teaching practice at the tertiary level' (p91).

Additionally, he considered that

'validity of the course team approach has been proven by the quality of materials that the Open University has produced ...' (p92).

There is no doubt that OU courses, developed through teams, have been successful. The role of course teams has been an important focus of discussion in literature relating to the Open University but there are suggestions of a continued, often negative tension between academic staff and educational designers (Tight, 1984). Tight's view was that the crucial roles in course teams were in management and distribution rather than academic staff, 'the Open University needs hacks and fixers more than it needs dons' (p49).

The distinction between subject matter and experiences of teaching and learning is at the heart of the discussion. Educational technologists argue that use of their expertise may be necessary to produce more balance between study material and tutorials and counselling (Smith, 1980) and that because they derive their role from educational research and theory they can contribute to the design of courses and enhance the quality of instructional texts (Kelly, 1988). These views however ignore the possibility of integrating content and process or technical and psycho-social aspects of learning opportunities, which are important in the present study.

Design and technology in distance education, as in any other form of education, should utilise a wide range of media and 'instructional methods', including writing as a 'technology'. Educational technology must be considered in the broadest sense and drawing on a wide ranging set of theoretical and practical activities (Evans and Nation 1989). In this sense, Evans and Nation remind us that

'the use of reprographic printing and the post were the fundamental technologies in pioneering distance education' and that 'now the computer is the fundamental tool which is framing the educational future and it is doing this from within a post-industrial world which is shaking off many of its previous structures and coalescing around new forms' (p7).

The development of smaller scale and specialist courses means that large team approaches will not always be viable or desirable. The experience and products of the OU team approach have provided an influential framework for other courses, perhaps enabling others to produce valid courses without teams, by adopting certain principles established by the OU. Specifically, many OU courses are large-scale, with several hundred students in a single cohort. Discussions with OU staff suggest that sometimes the system is inflexible, with little opportunity to modify extensive and expensive materials or systems once they are in operation. The activities of course teams are time-consuming and

'may sometimes produce bad compromises rather than a good resolution of the inevitable conflicts that arise among any group of academics' (Paul, 1990 p88)

Since the 1970s developments in distance education have led to courses for a wide variety of purposes. Over half the universities in Britain now offer at least one programme by distance learning, often for small numbers and 'tailored to highly specific needs' (Jenkins, 1995). Alternatives to the large course team approach to development have been necessary, often revolving around the balance between academic, design and administrative considerations. As in the present study, academic staff are involved in writing course materials and in overseeing writing of colleagues from inside and outside their institution. The efforts of professionals whose knowledge and skills are focused on

the processes of teaching and learning have been influential in the development of distance education and today, even where courses can not rely on direct contact with such colleagues, there is a wealth of literature relating to the design and development of materials and course structure (see, for example Rowntree, 1994; Lockwood, 1995). Probably the most important development which has made small-scale distance education projects possible in recent years is the availability of new technologies for desk-top publishing. This enables in-house production of good quality materials which can be easily modified and updated regularly. A variety of approaches to successful distance education is now documented. Shears (1992) describes a continuum ranging from the Course Team Model which is the most collaborative, to the Institution Model using a 'solo author' which is least collaborative. The models described vary in the extent to which institutions use in-house or contract subject staff and educational advisers.

Student-centred supported learning

The potential flexibility of distance education means that students can study in their own time and place and sometimes, if the distance education is also 'open' education, at their own pace. Distance education courses vary in the level at which they accommodate the needs and interests of the individual student and in the extent to which the course can be described as 'open learning'. Open learning, which Scriven (1991) calls a 'relative concept' (p299), describes a wide variety of arrangements. In the genuinely open approach, the student may enter and leave the programme at any time and complete the programme over an indefinite period. In practice, many programmes, in particular those which carry an award, set boundaries within which the student will study and complete assignments.

More recent theoretical discussion increases the focus on the 'education' in distance education and a number of writers point to the opportunities distance education presents to 'transform' learners and to develop independence and reflection. Smyth (1989) and

Burge and Haughey (1993) describe aspects of distance education which aim to develop critical reflection in teachers as adult learners. Evans and Nation (1992) suggest the need for post-industrial views of distance education, focusing less on its structure than on how communication between teacher and learner is facilitated. Stressing the need to draw on broader social and educational theories, they suggest that the issue of human agency is central to the understanding of how students transform knowledge and impose their own interpretations on course materials. Fundamentally, the practices of distance education must be seen in the context of how they address the problems of time and space, that is, how they meet the challenges of distance.

An important contribution to discussion of distance education has been made by Moore (1984) who also considers that development of independent study is a critical feature. Moore has reviewed the extent to which the variables of learner-responsibility and autonomy, self-motivation and choice are characteristics of distance education programmes. In his view 'distance' equates with 'separation' (Moore 1991). This may be not only geographical but more importantly, in the understanding and perceptions of teachers and learners which present a potential psychological and a communication gap or 'transactional distance'. Although Moore raises this as a particular theoretical issue in distance education, it is a problem for any educational efforts. The challenge for any teacher, of any age or category of learner, is to reduce the possibility for misunderstandings. Perhaps the magnitude of some of the physical separations in distance education has led to a greater concern to address this but it highlights important issues in face-to-face teaching. Success in distance education according to Moore (1991), is determined by the effectiveness of the dialogue between teacher and learner, again however, a feature of successful education in any form. Moore's theories have perhaps been overemphasised as specific to distance education but they serve usefully to focus on pedagogical issues in teaching and learning in general.

The development of distance education materials and activities has led to reconsideration of many fundamental aspects of teaching and learning. By implication, students learning at a distance are away from the educational institution and are usually expected to develop independence in their learning. One of the important challenges of distance education is to develop effective support systems for students so that there is a balance between dependence and independence.

Adult learning and distance education

Distance education can be found at all stages of the life cycle but much of it is concerned with meeting the educational needs of adults. Jevons suggested that it was mainly appropriate for mature students (defined as over twenty one). He believed that 'an act of will' was required to resume study and that there should not be 'a mere continuation on the conveyor belt from school to university' (1984 p25)

The literature on adult learning resonates with the strategies and processes of distance education. The potential flexibility of distance education can offer considerable advantage to adults and to adults who are professionals, so that there can be 'an intimate relationship between learning and living' (Garrison, 1989). Course developers need to be aware of the particular needs of adult learners.

Brookfield (1986) reviews the assumptions of andragogy, defined by Knowles (1983) as 'the art and science of helping adults learn' (p55). This includes assumptions about the extent to which adults tend towards self-directedness as they mature, the effectiveness of experiential and problem-solving activities in adult learning and the extent to which adults wish to apply newly acquired skills and knowledge to their immediate circumstances. There are arguments that effective educational processes for adults should not be distinguished from those for children and that pedagogical and andragogical assumptions hold many similarities. There are also suggestions that not all adult learners in distance education programmes are motivated towards immediate

application of their learning to their circumstances. Jolles (1992) for example, found that there was little relationship between courses studied, their results and the employment enhancement of students in Israel. However, students in professional development courses are usually specifically interested in the application of their learning to the work context. This must be central to the plans of a course developer.

A number of metaphors in the teaching and learning process in distance education are suggested by Haughey (1991) which are specifically relevant to adult learning and to the development of courses for teachers wishing to develop a professional specialism:

Metaphors of *power and control*: where the knowledge promoted by the course is seen as a commodity controlled by the institution, to be transferred to learners. In any scrutiny of course development and course effectiveness, it will be necessary to consider how the decisions about course content and structure have been made. Undisclosed values about the choice of knowledge are contained in the course materials and where a course claims to enhance professional development, it will be necessary to state clearly how its content and processes are a response to identified professional need and the extent to which they are owned by the students.

Metaphors of *growth*: Haughey endorses the need for effective support and guidance for students and the implications for an element of personal care and interest in the learner. This metaphor requires the tutor to pose questions rather than to answer them. It also implies that the tutor must be involved in the course development rather than be separate from the course designers. Tutors need to be able to comment on the appropriateness of the learning activities for those involved, and, in the case of a course in professional development it is important that tutors have credibility as active professionals themselves.

Haughey introduces metaphors of *travel* in which the curriculum is seen as a journey which affects each individual differently. Notions of the traveller and the guide journeying together again have implications for the relationship of tutors with students. An important challenge will be in the encouragement of critical dialogue and in striking

a balance between learner autonomy and the tutor's role as guide and challenger. Important decisions will be necessary on how many choices about the content and process are available to the learner and the amount and kinds of assistance provided throughout the learning. It is Haughey's belief that the journey metaphor most captures the pedagogical (and perhaps andragogical) issues in distance education.

There are implications here for the development of professional courses by distance education as the balance between the control of the learning by the institution and by the student will need consideration, as will the ability of the course to deal with immediate practical issues and to link theory with professional practice. The need to ensure that tutors and course developers adhere to a similar belief in teaching and learning is essential and will define one of the tasks of the institution providing the course, to ensure adequate support for the tutors who support the students. Haughey's view links with Gaskell and Mills' (1989) observation that, in distance education, a recurrent theme in the writing has been the challenge of the interactive process. They suggest that there are particular difficulties in distance education in shifting control to the students, rather than the course providers. Various possibilities are suggested, including an emphasis on allowing students to build from their own experience or to select from a choice of assignments.

Distance education and teachers

In the UK, since the introduction of the OU, teachers have formed a large group of distance education students. Initially taking general degrees to enhance their career prospects, they were later also provided with a range of professional development opportunities. In Scotland, the OU

'made opportunities accessible through distance learning to teachers whom the colleges and universities could not, or did not try, to reach' (Marker 1991 p29).

A similar pattern is reported in many contexts. In Australia, Evans and Nation (1991) report that teachers have always comprised an important group in distance education. Examples of teacher education at all levels are described in a volume edited by Perraton (1993). Many so-called developing countries have provided distance education for initial teacher education in order to provide for expansion in provision of education; examples are cited of courses in Nigeria, Tanzania, Pakistan and Nepal. A new development in the UK has been the introduction of initial teacher education through the OU (Leach, Mills and Smith, 1994). At all levels of professional development, distance education can provide opportunities for teachers who would otherwise not be able to undertake courses.

Perraton suggests that three main questions are raised by planners who consider distance education for teacher training: 'First, is it any good? Second, what does it cost? Third, what are the conditions of success?' (Perraton, 1993 p15). The first and the third are mainly of interest in this project and although the second is not directly discussed, it is inevitably relevant and related to the other two.

The impact of professional development

Recent documentation emphasises that professional development for teachers must impact positively on classroom practice (Teacher Training Agency, 1995). Professional development activities vary widely and studies have considered various aspects of short INSET courses as well as longer, award-bearing courses. The greatest impact is generally reported when whole education authorities (LEAs), schools or groups in schools engage in activities even where an individual is the identified student. Such activities will be explicitly linked with policies and development plans. Examples include the partnership one-term in-service (OTIS) course reported by Cowne and Norwich (1987), where LEA representatives, head teachers, schools staff and higher education tutors engaged collaboratively in school-focused activities. There were similar participants in the Special Educational Needs in the Ordinary School (SENIOS)

projects reported by Hegarty and Moses (1988) with a strong focus on course members as agents of change. Halpin, Croll and Redman (1990) and Cope, Inglis, Riddell and Sulhunt (1992) report studies of teachers' own perceptions of effects of higher education-based in-service courses. The first study, whilst acknowledging the difficulties of teachers' self-reports, found high levels of reported effects on day-to-day work in classrooms with related positive effects on pupils. There were fewer effects on schools. The second study examined effects of part-time inservice degrees following their completion 2-11 years previously. Reported effects were related more to gains in knowledge and understanding than in effects on classroom teaching. However, where improved teaching was reported, this was related to increased understanding of classroom processes. Collaborative efforts of groups of colleagues are considered particularly important in special education by Ainscow (1995). He suggests that a community of teachers engaged in a development activity will use their multiple perspectives in critically reflecting on problems. He promotes professional development activities which can be located within schools and classrooms. This may be especially pertinent to distance education where participating professionals remain in post whilst following a course. The present study investigates whether distance education has the potential to change practice, perhaps more effectively than traditional training courses, because of the ways in which coursework can integrate with day-to-day work.

Distance education and special education

There are few research studies of the development of opportunities for teachers in special education by distance learning. The OU's first course in special education began in 1982 (Swann, 1981). It aimed to provide for a range of students, not only teachers, in a variety of settings and focused on broad concepts in special education. One of the difficulties in offering distance education to practitioners is the provision of observation and feedback on practice. In the OU course, a decision was made by the developers not to provide students with direct feedback on their practical work but the aim was to help students in 'thinking about what they currently do and how it might change' (p23).

Distance education has the potential to encourage reflection on practice and this, in turn, has the potential to change practice.

Following this the Open University developed further professional development materials which more directly responded to the 1981 Education Act. 'Teaching for Diversity' (Potts and Booth, 1987) was a generic course in special education which promoted the view that difficulties in learning resulted from a mismatch between pupils and curricula. It aimed to develop awareness of the ways in which all schools could 'respond to and reflect the diversity of their pupils' (Booth, Potts and Swann, 1987 pviii). Continuing from this, 'Learning for All' was launched in 1992, more explicitly promoting inclusive practices in schools for the range of pupil needs.

In the same year that the first OU course began, Chapman (1982) reported on a new course by distance education, at the University of Birmingham, to train teachers of visually handicapped children. The development was supported by the DES and was the first course of its kind in the UK outside of the OU

'and so it has set a notable precedent in the potential development of distance teaching programmes in this country' (p165).

In many ways, the course followed the patterns of established distance learning programmes, relying on text and recorded materials and organised support for students in various ways, including regional seminars and a residential component. However, whereas the Open University addressed general issues in special education, this was a specialist course. An element of assessed practice was introduced, for specialist skills, which was required if the participating teachers were to gain recognition from the DES to teach children with visual impairments. The main stimuli for this mode of professional development were financial and geographical. Teacher education was facing cutbacks, rather than initiatives which should have arisen from the Warnock Report (Department of Education and Science, 1978) recommendations for expanding training to provide more specialist expertise. Although a full-time course was well-subscribed, there were

teachers who for many reasons could not leave home for a year to gain a qualification in Birmingham. The small numbers of pupils with visual impairments were not seen at that time to justify the setting up of new campus-based courses so that an initiative was required to reach relatively small numbers of teachers, thinly spread across the country. Also writing from the University of Birmingham, Best (1993) suggested that there was little difficulty in providing evidence that distance education could be effective for teacher education in general. Examples of this effectiveness are provided by Oliveira and Rumble (1991) who found equally successful graduation rates across distance education and traditional systems for teachers in Latin America. Similarly, Coldevin and Naidu (1989), with particular reference to teachers' professional development, found that provided programmes were carefully designed and implemented, then monitored and evaluated for continuing improvement, DE could provide effective parallel systems to traditional training patterns. Best (1993) suggested that for teachers of visually impaired children, the outcomes of courses were similar, but the experience of the students in the different modes were different. Campus-based students enjoyed the interaction with each other and the opportunity to step back and reflect on their work. Distance education students liked the flexibility of their study and of feeling in control of it. They felt that the course was linked with their everyday work and the materials could be used as a resource.

'From the distance education students came the clear message that being able to study was more important than any inconvenience in the delivery system' (Best 1993 p256).

In spite of the positive conclusion of the students, Best cites cost and access as the main advantages of distance education but considered that students at a distance could be disadvantaged in terms of the teaching of practical skills, access to literature, interaction with staff and other students and in the maintenance of motivation for independent study. Cost and access are clearly advantages for employers if the alternative is a full-time course requiring the student to leave their home base and if their employer has to pay the salary of another professional while they are in training. However, even in the short time

since Best's report, opportunities for teachers in the UK have changed considerably. Full-time study has become extremely rare and comparisons between distance education and full-time study are hardly valid. Distance education now has to be considered against part-time courses and school-based inservice activities. Perhaps the most important consideration is how far any of these opportunities affect classroom practice.

The precedent set by the course in visual impairment led to the development of other specialist courses at the University of Birmingham, of which speech and language difficulties was the third (following a course for teachers of the hearing impaired). The model of development was to base the courses, through research and investigation, on identified needs of teachers and services. There is a commitment to ensure that the courses are valid, responsive to needs and address practical issues. Importantly, they provide access for those who would not otherwise have professional development opportunities. This pattern has continued. In 1991 Davison reported on her study of the need to develop teachers to work with deaf-blind children. Amongst the conclusions were that there was a 'central core of knowledge' needed by teachers of multi-sensory impaired children. However, because the population of children was likely to need only 10-15 teachers a year and because a full-time course would be unlikely to be accessible to many of them, distance education should be one of the options available (Davison, 1991). Further distance education courses have followed in the education of children with learning difficulties (moderate, severe and profound-multiple), autism, emotional and behaviour difficulties and in learning support.

Summary

This chapter has reviewed the characteristics of distance education and considered some of the ways in which it links with perspectives on adult learning. A number of features of distance education have been identified which make it appropriate for adults with busy personal and professional lives who wish to continue learning linked with their day-to-day work. A central issue in discussions of distance education has been defined as the

integration of course content with teaching and learning processes. A further question for investigation is how a small scale specialist distance education course can ensure effective learning of relevant knowledge and skills which can have a positive impact in the workplace. There is a clear rationale for the facilitation of close links between the content, or technical aspects of the course and the proposed approaches to teaching and learning. The interaction of tutors and learners and consideration of students' working environments will be critical where the course aims to support professional development. These issues and questions will be explored through an evaluation of the establishment and experience of a specialist course for teachers of pupils with speech and language difficulties. In the next two chapters, the nature of these difficulties and the provision for them will be explored and the rationale for professional development through distance education will be examined.

CHAPTER 2: SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES, A FOCUS OF CONCERN

Introduction

This thesis is about the development and evaluation of a course and the purpose of this chapter is to provide background and a context for the study as a particular example of professional development in special education. The chapter sets out some of the main terms and issues in providing professional development opportunities in this field. Other contexts, such as education of pupils with other types of difficulty might highlight similar processes in distance education. In other respects, features of teachers' work settings and working relationships in the field of speech and language difficulties add uniqueness to the evaluation study and need special consideration.

In recent years there has been an increased emphasis on language and communication skills in education, with 'use of language' constituting a 'common requirement' of the National Curriculum in England and Wales . It is now explicit that

'pupils should be taught to express themselves clearly in both speech and writing and to develop their reading skills. They should be taught to use grammatically correct sentences and to spell and punctuate accurately in order to communicate effectively in written English or, when the medium is Welsh, in written Welsh' (School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 1994 p6)

In the context of a curriculum which emphasises speaking and listening, identification of speech and language difficulties will therefore be particularly important.

The study does not set out to finally clarify definitions of speech and language difficulties but to work within an area of children's development frequently identified as problematic. An assumption is made that the difficulties exist, although in developing the content and processes of a course, the use of terms and frameworks for the work are a

focus for critical discussion. Similar assumptions are made by Duffield, Riddell and Brown (1995) in their study of specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) where a number of sometimes conflicting but also overlapping views exist. Speech and language difficulties is not an unchanging concept. There is no equivalent of 20/20 vision in communication skills and there is increasing awareness of the importance of the context of the 'problem'. Whilst there is fair agreement on the most severe and specific difficulties, other difficulties may be blurred by notions of what is acceptable speech in social and educational contexts. There is always therefore the possibility of an element of socially constructed overlay in the identification of speech and language 'problems'. It is the intention of the course evaluated in this study to raise awareness of speech and language difficulties, enhancing teachers' knowledge and skills to work in this field. It has been suggested in the case of specific learning difficulties that

'it may be necessary to have a measure of categorisation and to apply it as flexibly as possible (Duffield, Riddell and Brown, 1995 p200)

Speech and language difficulties may benefit from a similar approach.

In this chapter some of the ways in which speech and language difficulties have been defined will be examined together with issues arising in connection with definition and description. For example, distinction is often made between language described as 'delayed' and that described as 'disordered'; the term, 'specific' as applied to language difficulties is also seen to be significant. Acknowledging the problems involved in definition, there are arguments against the notion of a rigid categorisation and it is proposed instead that patterns of development and a continuum of difficulties are considered.

Given the problems with definition, particularly when apparently 'loose definitions' have reduced the usefulness of surveys, it is difficult to quantify exactly the extent of speech and language difficulties in the population. However, it is accepted that speech and

language difficulties constitute a significant problem for some children, cause anxiety to families and challenge educational services.

Finally, the chapter examines some of the ways in which speech and language difficulties are construed by professionals. This highlights some fundamental differences and suggests where professional development activities must be directed if teachers and speech and language therapists are to share a common perspective and develop a real understanding of each others' work, which is fundamental to a truly collaborative approach.

What are speech and language difficulties?

A very unclear distinction is often made between a 'speech' and a 'language' difficulty and the terms are often used interchangeably. A language difficulty can occur at any of the levels of language: sounds and structure; meaning; the way language is used. The word 'speech' in the phrase 'speech and language' is therefore often strictly redundant, although if it was absent, 'language difficulty' might be interpreted as a problem with a foreign language (or English as a second language). The term is increasingly being applied across aspects of spoken and written language.

Bloom and Lahey (1978) presented language components as content, form and use. Content refers to the ideas that are encoded in messages and the development of content depends on the interaction between knowledge and context. Form is the means for connecting sound, or other symbols, with meaning. It consists of an inventory of linguistic units (phonology, morphology, syntax) and the rules for their combination. Use has two major aspects: function and context. Function refers to the goals of language, the reasons why people speak, or write or sign. Context refers to how individuals understand and choose among alternative forms for reaching these goals. As a child's language develops, content, form and use overlap and integrate as overall 'knowledge of language' (Lahey, 1988). In Bloom and Lahey's terms, a language or a speech difficulty becomes

apparent when there is a disruption within one of these components or in the integration of content, form and use. There may therefore be difficulties with ideas, with the language structure or in learning to use language appropriate for the linguistic community.

Characteristics

The rates and patterns of children's language acquisition vary widely and there are differences in attitudes to spoken language. Language diversity is a feature of social and cultural groups. Subjective responses are evoked and Crystal and Varley (1993) suggest a risk in confusing 'genuine' communication difficulty with 'apparent' difficulty due to the prejudice and intolerance of listeners. Expectations of what can be considered 'normal' are varied and depend on ability in the context of a child's age, background and experience. There are no absolute definitions. Authors use the words 'diverse' (Donaldson, 1995) and 'continua' (Webster and McConnell, 1987) to convey the complexity of difficulties which occur. The words 'constellation' and 'spectrum' also indicate the variety and range of features. Language difficulties are characterised by

'descriptive continua such as the child's intelligibility, comprehension of meaning and mastery of the structure of language'. (Webster and McConnell, 1987 p25)

Difficulties can be experienced in any aspects of the content, form or use of language and the effects on communication will be different in every case. Regardless of whether the language difficulties are described as 'specific' (see below) or are associated with other difficulties, the child's language may be characterised by a range of features and may include problems with aspects of comprehension, expression, or both. Intelligibility may be affected by the omission, substitution or distortion of sounds; features of prosody, that is stress and intonation; voice control or resonance. A difficulty can occur at different linguistic levels (components): grammar, semantics (including vocabulary) and pragmatics (language function). Expression may be limited to short utterances used

appropriately or may comprise long adult-like sentences which are empty of meaning. A child may merely echo language heard from others. There may be associated difficulties with written forms of language.

Language delay and disorder

The literature often draws a distinction between 'delay' and 'disorder' or sometimes, 'deviance' when discussing children's language difficulties. Delay is identified as language similar to that expected from a younger child. Recommendations vary on the amount of delay deemed significant. Whitehurst and Fischel (1994) review the literature on delay and find wide discrepancies in criteria used. They suggest that 'language quotients' of between 1.5 and 2 standard deviations are the determinants and that the children should also have non-verbal intelligence quotients of 'no more than 1 SD below the mean' (p621).

A key factor in identifying specific language delay is thus assumed to be the difference between children's verbal and non-verbal abilities. However, a range of tests is normally used, which may correlate only weakly with each other and any use of norm-referenced test scores will fail to take account of individual differences and variations within age groups. Formal assessment results need to be considered alongside functional, interactive language. Rapin (1996) suggests that observation of language use in imaginative play with a partner is important in differentially diagnosing the nature of the difficulty. In comparison with delay, language disorder is considered to be quantitatively and qualitatively different (Crystal and Varley, 1993) and features may occur that would not usually be produced by children of any age. However, the distinction between delay and disorder is not absolute. There are no precise definitions of what is normal. Some children will use sounds, structures or words which would be expected from a much younger child. As they develop, they become effective communicators and it is possible to say, in retrospect, that their language was 'delayed'. For other children, observation over time does not show this type of progression and their difficulties may be more

persistent; the structures of sounds and words are different from the patterns usually found in development. Some children retain immature or 'deviant' sounds and structures alongside more mature versions. This type of language difficulty may be called 'language disorder'. Lahey (1988) suggests that language disorder is often identified by

'persons who encounter the child interacting in many situations that demand talking and understanding' (p20)

This suggests difficulty in a variety of contexts and emphasises the importance of communicative partners in the experience of the difficulty.

The nature of the difficulties only becomes apparent when a child's development has been studied over time and in different settings. The relationship of the rate of onset to the pattern of a child's language development can provide more clues on how to help the child than merely giving the language a label. It is not possible to make dogmatic statements about a child's language development for, as Webster and McConnell point out

'A child's language behaviour at one moment in time has a unique and complex relationship with background experience, abilities and development, together with influences in the present context in which communication takes place' (1987 p24).

'Specific' language difficulties

There are communication difficulties which have clearly identifiable biological or medical origins. For example, difficulties may arise primarily from the structural effects of cleft lip or palate; vocal cord nodules will affect the quality of the voice and may cause difficulties of adequate volume or intonation; severe hearing loss may affect the development of clear speech. They may also be linked with more general learning difficulties, autism or physical disabilities. Whitehurst and Fischel (1994) suggest that these difficulties should be identified as 'secondary language delay', that is, the language characteristics are secondary to another condition. Other apparent difficulties have less

obvious causes and some language 'disorders' are identified through a process of exclusion. If a child's communication difficulties can not be found to be influenced by hearing impairment, neurological impairment or other physiological signs, then a diagnosis of 'specific language disorder' or 'impairment' may be made.

'Specific language impairment is diagnosed where there is failure of normal language development that cannot be explained in terms of mental or physical handicap, hearing loss, emotional disorder or environmental deprivation' (Bishop, 1992 p3)

Byers Brown and Edwards suggested that the term 'specific' as a qualifier arose from the need to disassociate language disorders from other handicapping conditions and to affirm them as handicapping in their own right (1989 p6). They also suggest that the term may be

'appropriate to this phase of our evolution of the subject which will be discarded when the conditions which it covers have been more clearly identified' (Byers Brown and Edwards, 1989 p7).

Reality suggests that there are many overlaps across the spectrum of difficulties. Haynes and Naidoo (1991) for example, in a study of children identified as having severe and specific speech and language impairment, described a number of other difficulties experienced by the children, including visuo-spatial, motor and behaviour problems. Several studies suggest a link between language difficulties and behavioural or emotional difficulties (see for example Stevenson, Richman and Graham, 1985; Stevenson, 1990).

Parents and language difficulties

One of the most compelling factors in identification of speech and language difficulties is the role played by parents, who are frequently the first to express concern, usually before their child is of school-age. Law and Elias (1996) found that parents were concerned about their child's speech between the ages of 12 months and three years. In a study undertaken for the voluntary body, AFASIC, to gather information on parents' experiences of services for their children, 441 parent responses were analysed. Whilst

it is acknowledged that these were parents who had already joined a parent organisation and were perhaps more aware than others, of language difficulties, it is striking that

'More than half of the children in the sample were recognised as having a difficulty by at least one person before the age of two years' (AFASIC 1993 p6).

In over one third of the cases, the concern came before the expected advent of intelligible speech because of, for example, lack of babbling or early sounds, unusual eye contact, withdrawn behaviour or feeding difficulties. 95% recognised a difficulty by the age of four years. Context is important and parents will have different expectations, however, they frequently compare development of their own children within and outside the family and it appears that the development of communication skills is often a focus for these comparisons. These perspectives are important in the identification of speech and language problems and contribute to what may be seen as somewhat flexible boundaries of definitions. In a study of speech and language therapists' work, Roulstone (1995) found that priority was given to children whose communicative context could no longer support their needs unaided. If communicative needs were being met adequately by the child's context, the child would not be a priority for therapy. This would apply equally to home and to school contexts and supports the view that teachers should be equipped to understand and meet a wide range of communication needs in the classroom. The precise features of the child's speech and language will not be the only factors in any decision-making and individual characteristics of children and their families will be important. Fey (1986) uses normative and naturalistic assessment in reaching decisions about a child's difficulties and the dimensions of 'assertiveness' and 'responsiveness' to amplify information. Some children with apparently minor speech or language problems are uncommunicative whereas others, whose speech is quite unintelligible, can be effective communicators. This type of view demonstrates the complexity of assessment of speech and language and concurs with other areas of special educational need where it is observed that specific characteristics of a child, or their context, affect the educational implications of a difficulty or disability.

Discussions of language development and language difficulty have to take account of both the child's learning strategies and the environmental input. There are studies which suggest that the interactions of parents with children with delayed language are different from others where language is not of concern. Whitehurst and Fischel (1994) reported that children described as 'expressively delayed' at the age of two, experienced a verbal environment very much like that of normally-developing 17-month-olds but not like normally-developing 28-month-olds. They suggest that the child's language delay comes first, which then causes parents to speak differently and that this may play a role in maintaining the delay.

Similar observations were made by Davis, Stroud and Green (1988). They noted that children described as having language delay at two years were exposed to less maternal language in a free-play situation compared with younger children whose language was at a similar stage of development. Whilst not suggesting that the characteristics of the interactions cause language delay, the authors suggest that they may put the children at risk. They suggest that their findings endorse a need to work with families in cases of delay.

Conti-Ramsden (1987) reported on mother-child interactions where the child was described as 'language impaired' (expressive language), comparing them with siblings at a similar level of language development. She observes that the mothers were less responsive and more regulative with their language-impaired children, a finding which Conti-Ramsden says is not surprising since the children request less and respond less to their mothers. She also concludes that since differences were found in interactions with another child from the same family, it is not the mother's style per se which is deficient but the nature of the reciprocity induced when interacting with the child who demands less in communication.

The above studies are cited because of the importance of considering the family in assessment and management of language difficulty and of taking seriously expressions of anxiety about a child's language development in the early years. There are implications for increasing the knowledge and understanding of language for teachers and others who work with children

The size of the problem

It is not easy to know how many children experience difficulties in acquiring speech and language. Surveys use different definitions and categorise problems in a variety of ways. Language changes as children grow and develop so that figures will be different for different age groups. It is important however, to have some reasonable estimate of numbers of children that can be expected for the planning of educational, social and health services. Early studies often categorised children with 'speech disorders', that is, unclear speech was the distinguishing feature. The influence of medical approaches and the lack of linguistic information for these studies means that they are likely to have included children who would now be considered to have a language difficulty. Other studies group together children whose difficulties seem to be specifically in communication with those whose speech or language difficulties are associated with other developmental difficulties such as physical disability or autism. Over the years knowledge has changed. New approaches to assessment have developed and surveys use different ways of measuring language and speech difficulty so that exact comparisons between studies are difficult.

Bone and Meltzer's study (1989) aimed to provide estimates of the type and severity of disabilities of people in Britain, noting that an inescapable basis for the assessment of disability in children is the notion of what is 'normal' for a particular age. The study suggested that, across the age groups from 0 to 15, the prevalence of 'communication disability', associated with a range of other identified problems, was second only to problems of behaviour. As might be expected, more difficulties are observed in younger

children and the figures become less as age increases. This is evident from Morley's early study of children in Newcastle upon Tyne where, at age three years nine months, 10 per cent of the children 'could not make themselves understood' within and outside the family. The figure was 5 per cent at four years nine months and 0.7 per cent at six years six months (Morley, 1957 p29). Although in one sense the criteria may be considered crude measures, in another, they are useful as they link with the functional reality of a child's communicative efforts with partners, teachers, parents and others who have to interact with a child on a daily basis. It reminds us that parents will be involved at the earliest stages and with the largest number of children with communication difficulties. Some of the difficulties will resolve, without help, before school age, some will need help so that the children enter school with adequate communication skills. When teachers become involved, they will be dealing with smaller numbers of children, but with more severe and persistent difficulties. Additionally, although the majority of difficulties are found in young children it has also been suggested (Beveridge, 1989) that problems may emerge for some children for the first time in secondary school because of the different demands made of their spoken and written language skills.

Rutter and his colleagues in the Isle of Wight study suggested 0.8 children per thousand to have severe language problems at school age and this endorses many studies which give a figure of approximately one per thousand of school age children with severe speech or language difficulties (Rutter, Tizard and Whitmore, 1970).

Enderby and Philipp (1986) acknowledge the problems in arriving at a consensus and endorse the concerns listed above about the lack of agreed terminology. Their figures are derived from an assembly of estimates from previously reported studies, although they accept the results of the National Child Development Study in the 1970s as the most detailed. Peckham (1973) reported from this study that seven-year-olds were selected as their 'minor infantile mispronunciations' have usually disappeared spontaneously by this age. 10 to 13% of their sample had 'some degree of speech

impairment' as judged by teachers and medical officers. The comment that children were 'more often males and from manual social backgrounds' (p7) suggests that evidence of 'specific' language impairment needs to be interpreted carefully as the group may include effects of judgement of a wide variety of language style characteristic of different social groups. In Britain, opinions about accents and dialects have often been associated with perceptions of intelligence and social class so that acceptability of language varies (Giles, 1987). Different values are attached to the use of verbal interaction. Nevertheless, as suggested earlier, teachers' judgements of speech intelligibility are relevant. Sheridan's further examination of the data of the National Child Development Study suggested that as a group, 'children with speech and language difficulties are severely handicapped in school and everyday life' (p14). By comparison with a control group, the children with speech delay were considered to be later to achieve walking, were more clumsy, less socially competent and making slower progress in reading and number work in school. One of Sheridan's conclusions was

'Teachers in training need more adequate instruction regarding child development, particularly with respect to the acquisition of speech and language in young children' (Sheridan, 1973 p15)

Similar themes occur in Silva's conclusions (1987) in comparing the results of several studies of language delay. He notes that although many children described as having early language delay do not show the delay later,

'they are at increased risk of having a later low IQ and/or reading difficulties in the early school years' (p12).

He concludes that this indicates that early language delays have considerable significance for later development and that identification and intervention are worthwhile.

The different ways of defining language difficulties highlight the importance of looking at the patterns of development, as described above. The variable figures nevertheless

suggest that many staff, particularly in primary schools, can expect to meet pupils whose communication skills present difficulties, and with whom they have difficulty communicating, for whatever reason. Although many pre-school children identified as having early language difficulties, may no longer experience problems in speech and language on entering school at the age of five, where language difficulties persist, in older children, they are likely to be more severe and more complex, characterised by impairment of a range of language functions. Bishop and Edmundson (1987) studied a group of four-year-old children referred for speech therapy because of concern about their language, rather than identifying them by using predefined test criteria. They endorsed the observation frequently made, that patterns of language impairment changed as children improved and that poor outcomes were most likely in children with difficulties in language structure and content, rather than in phonology only, especially if comprehension was also impaired. Where children have phonological difficulties, it is suggested that the patterns of difficulty may be important predictors of outcome. Children who show patterns common in normal development possibly have a better prognosis than those who use atypical phonological processes. Their findings again support the need for careful observation and analysis of children's language development over time.

Finally, the studies generally show that boys are more likely to be identified than girls, perhaps twice as many, although there has so far been no satisfactory explanation for this. Similar observations are made of other difficulties, for example, so-called specific learning difficulties (Duffield, Riddell and Brown, 1995) and autism (Bailey, Phillips and Rutter, 1996). It is not clear how much the difficulties are linked with innate differences or whether they are linked with socially generated differences.

Inevitably, figures reflect not only changing patterns of health care, educational philosophy and developments in understanding, but also changing social patterns and

perceptions. Whilst a general dissatisfaction with the lack of accurate figures must be registered, Byers Brown and Edwards say (1989)

'Whatever the figures on language delay, it is continuously cited as the most common developmental problem found in preschool children' (p11).

and that

'in order to provide for language-disordered children in the immediate future, we have to make use of such figures as we have' (p8).

Language difficulty in education

In recent educational history, speech difficulties were identified as one of the ten 'categories of handicap' following the Education Act of 1944. The Categories of Handicapped Pupils, listed in the Handicapped Pupils and Special School Regulations, 1959, cited in the Warnock Report, lists 'pupils suffering from speech defect, that is to say, pupils who on account of defect or lack of speech not due to deafness require special educational treatment' (Department of Education and Science, 1978, Appendix II.). The word 'speech' appears to include children whom we now describe as having a language difficulty.

There are problems in not having up-to-date figures and in the lack of agreements on what constitutes a language difficulty. A suggestion that the figures on incidence and prevalence related to trends in labelling of children with special needs was made by Booth (1981). He noted that the number of children identified as having a 'speech defect' increased more than seven times between 1970 and 1975, after which they decreased. The fall, he suggested, was because the children were 'reabsorbed' into other categories 'particularly the moderately subnormal'.

In 1987 Donlan reported that the DES claimed to have no statistical information on pupils with speech and language difficulties. He too acknowledges the change in incidence reported above and notes the 'absurd figures' reported by Hand in 1985 when

the incidence of 'speech defect' in special schools had grown by 3,500% from 1965 to 1975, then declined by 37% between 1978 and 1982 . Donlan argues that this reveals

'only the confusion of an education system presented with a significant problem, the nature of which is extremely complex, and the proper assessment of which falls outside the professional scope and current training of most workers in education' (Donlan 1987 p42).

However, Webster and McConnell (1987) suggest that about five per cent of children enter school with communication difficulties. Beech (1992), an educational adviser in speech and language difficulties suggests that at least two children in every mainstream class are experiencing 'marked difficulty with some aspect of communication'. There is no reason to believe that all of the children will have special educational needs, and the assertion does not resonate with the studies reported above, even if the figure of 0.7% at six years (Morley, 1957) is accepted. It also begs several questions including size of class, age of pupils and a precise definition of 'difficulty'. However, if advisory teachers are making this type of statement, it suggests that a raising of teachers' awareness of language and language development would be valuable, not least to prevent inappropriate labelling of children.

Approaches to language and language difficulty

Study in the field of language difficulty reflects a range of interests represented by different approaches to the subject. A brief review suggests some ways in which language difficulties are construed. None of the perspectives is incompatible with the others and each is relatively useful in different cases. Excessive emphasis on a single approach can be limiting and inappropriate and can serve to inhibit understanding by professionals who attempt to work together. In particular, they can create barriers between therapists and teachers.

Educational/social approaches

Although there is little educational literature explicitly discussing models of language difficulty, a scan of literature on language in education suggests some thinking which might influence approaches to the management of language in schools.

First, it is apparent that language in school has often been thought of as literacy, with little consideration of the elements of spoken language or of the contributions that spoken language makes to the development of literacy. As examples: In 1980, in an article entitled, 'Towards a policy for language assessment', Vincent refers only to the testing of reading and Beveridge (1989) suggests that concern about pupils' literacy in secondary schools is rarely linked with other skills in language and communication.

Speaking and listening were emphasised in the new national curriculum and a National Oracy Project, linked with the national curriculum had, amongst its aims, 'to enhance the role of speech in the learning process' and 'to promote recognition of the value of oral work in schools and increase its use as a means of improving learning' (National Curriculum Council, 1990 p2). Activities of the project emphasised opportunities for children to express themselves through spoken language and to learn through that medium. However, recent observation in primary schools suggests that an emphasis on literacy as language still prevails,

'In spite of the importance currently attached to the spoken word in primary education, language was dominated by reading and writing' (Alexander, 1995 p156)

Where the literature refers to spoken language, difficulties may be explained as a mismatch between the language of teaching and learning. Importance is given to the social performance aspects of language. For example, Robert Hull (1985) suggested that there is a 'language gap' between pupils' and teachers' language. Tasks, text books, work sheets and other teaching materials frequently contain language unfamiliar to pupils and, if not modified, will present obstacles to their comprehension and learning in

school. Attendance at school, like any other institution requires familiarity with procedures and with the language used and Mercer and Edwards (1981) suggested that pupils need to know the 'ground rules' for effective functioning in the classroom.

Endorsement of the social performance model of language is seen in a study of teachers' views. Roux (1990) asked teachers to comment on Attainment Target 1 (AT1), Speaking and Listening in the first version of the national curriculum and on children in a variety of speaking and listening tasks. She summarises the teachers' model as one which sees children as learning to use more language in school by becoming familiar with the school context. There was an implicit 'deficit' view of the child's experience, which would be enhanced by life in the classroom. However, the teachers demonstrated an explicit lack of confidence in how to assess speaking and listening and organise the curriculum to facilitate language development. They showed little awareness of links between language and thinking.

A similar observation is made by Newman (1996), a qualified teacher and speech therapist, who describes teachers taking a largely 'enrichment approach' to language, which she considered to have been endorsed in Government reports such as Plowden (Department of Education and Science, 1967) and Bullock (Department of Education and Science, 1975). This approach is concerned with presenting a wide range of language opportunities to children, and enhancing linguistic experience. In a study to examine how speech and language difficulties could be met in schools, Newman suggested that these difficulties 'perplex teachers' and that

'methods of stimulating and encouraging language usage that work so well for the vast majority of children, may not be enough for speech and language impaired children (Newman, 1994 p1)

Simply continuing to provide children with more of the same experience to which they have already failed to respond will not be helpful as their performance of language may not have the essential skills and processes to support it. Similarly, surrounding a child

with more books will not help if they are not succeeding with the early stages of literacy as they may not have the prerequisite language and perceptual skills with which to approach the written page. Indeed, school inspectors have made this point about the teaching of reading to young children more generally, noting that teachers who described their approach to reading as 'real books' simply assumed that the children's repeated experiences of hearing stories and sharing books would enable them to gain independence and discern essential patterns in the print with minimal help (Her Majesty's Inspectorate, 1990a).

Medical models

Medical models have been a dominant influence in the identification and explanation of language difficulties, as they have in other aspects of disability and special educational needs. The traditional medical approach attempts to explain a problem by identification of its cause and symptoms. Importance is placed on identifying the problem and giving it a name, a diagnosis, which suggests measures to be taken. This will be an appropriate step where there is a clear cause and course of treatment. For example, it will be necessary to identify and reduce the potential effects of ear infections, structural problems such as cleft lip or palate or difficulties with movement or breathing. Although a direct link between ear infection and language disorders has not been found, Bishop and Edmundson (1986) examined a sample of 69 children identified as having 'language disorder' against a control group and suggested that in some children otitis media (middle ear infection) may interact with other factors such as perinatal difficulties and become important. Further, they observed that a common background feature in the group with language disorder was a reported family history of a similar problem in a close relative. They suggested that investigation of genetic factors might be useful. Recent research has linked some language difficulties with familial, genetic characteristics. For example, Pembrey (1992) described an unusually large family in which 16 members had specific difficulties in expressive language 'in the absence of dysarthria (neurogenic articulation difficulty) hearing loss or low intelligence' (p54).

Many speech and language problems can not be precisely labelled and the relationship between causative factors and linguistic 'symptoms' is not direct. Further, medical diagnosis will give little indication of educational need but may suggest some measures to reduce potential effects.

In reality medical models include not only biological accounts but also social factors which may contribute, for example, to developmental problems of children. World Health Organisation classification of diseases includes social factors and recognises the complex interactions between biological and environmental influences on human reactions (Graham, 1995). This is no less relevant to language difficulties in which medical or biological processes may influence and be influenced by, social interactions. However, medical factors may play a part in the complexity of issues relating to educational decisions about an individual.

The decision to make speech therapy services the responsibility of the National Health Service in 1974 has probably perpetuated and endorsed medical ways of thinking in the profession. Speech and language therapists, who in some countries are known as 'pathologists', often refer to individuals as 'patients' and their work settings as 'clinics'. They engage in 'diagnosis' and 'prognosis' and frequently conclude that a person has a 'disorder'. In a review of literature, Eastwood (1995) notes that

'Even when there was no evidence of medical or biological pathology, the SLT literature pictured the client with a communication problem as 'disordered'. (p61)

She suggests that the power of a 'medicalised' professional view which is not shared by clients cannot be underestimated. A similar comment would apply to relationships with colleagues from other professions, for example, teachers. Whilst it is necessary to consider whether there are any physiological factors contributing to particular speech or language characteristics, this view can not provide a comprehensive picture of communication difficulties or speech and language difficulties. It has only limited use in

classroom settings where it is more important to consider the interactional aspects of language and the implications for learning and thinking. The use of terminology associated with medical approaches may be a particular disadvantage to speech and language therapists working in educational contexts.

Linguistic behaviour

Approaches which consider linguistic behaviour have gained influence in the past twenty years, perhaps as a result of linguists' increased interest in child language since the 1960s. The emphasis is on the detailed description of communicative behaviour rather than on causes or pathology. Bloom and Lahey's (1978) model, described earlier, is an example of description which identifies the key elements of functional language. Crystal and his colleagues developed procedures for the detailed analysis of developmental syntax (Crystal, Fletcher and Garman, 1976), prosody and semantics (Crystal 1982), which enabled practitioners to pinpoint specific aspects of a difficulty and assisted decisions about where to start teaching or therapy (for examples, see Crystal, 1979). Grunwell (1992a) demonstrates how a move from phonetic to phonological analysis of children's speech led to more useful distinctions in the nature of difficulties in language production. She explicitly links detailed phonological assessment with 'principled decision making' (Grunwell, 1992b). Such detail can suggest where to start teaching or therapy and how to work on those phonological processes which best promote a child's communicative adequacy.

The study of linguistic sciences is a major component of courses in speech and language therapy but the use of the associated complex terminology may be a deterrent to effective collaboration with educational professionals who may see language in a very different way.

Cognitive approaches

The fourth perspective is based on attempts to understand how people process language. Recently, practitioners in the field of human communication have been drawing on a combination of ideas from cognitive psychology, linguistics and neurology which raises hypotheses about brain function. Models of language processing attempt to consider aspects of input, internal representation and output of language components. They focus on perception and memory and their roles in reception, storage and reproduction of information in developing speech and language. Dockrell and McShane (1992) suggest that although children may be grouped according to overall patterns of language performance, each has a unique pattern of language abilities. These relate to characteristics of auditory processing, working memory and cognitive processes. Practitioners are beginning to collect developmental data on language processing and to use assessment procedures linked with psycholinguistic hypotheses about an individual's processing strategies 'on which to base principled remediation programmes' (Stackhouse and Wells, 1996 p10). They suggest that a psycholinguistic approach can go beyond the information gained from analysis of linguistic behaviour. They demonstrate how children with similar linguistic profiles will, on investigation, have different strengths and weaknesses in language processing and will therefore respond differently to teaching or therapy. Chiat (1994) explains the steps involved in going beyond the linguistic behaviour of a child using hypotheses about where the problem has arisen. Therapy is based on use of the child's strengths in processing to facilitate areas of difficulty. Working within such a framework will lead the practitioner to consider how the child uses its visual and auditory senses and perceptual skills and memory (Stackhouse and Wells, 1993).

Therapists' and teachers' views of language

The approaches identified above suggest that therapists and teachers view language and language difficulties in different, but potentially complementary ways. One way of looking at the differing approaches has been suggested by Daines (1992), who borrows

Chomsky's terms, 'competence' and 'performance'. He observes that a heavy focus on the skills and processes underpinning language, which he calls 'competence', is characteristic of the work of speech and language therapists. In education, the traditional approach to language is to focus on those aspects observed in the social activity of language in use, that is, 'performance'. Language activities in the classroom generally use social interaction and conversational exchanges with the purpose of extending the child's language into new situations and curriculum areas.

The adoption of these Chomskian terms is somewhat confusing, particularly as the term 'competence' may be commonly understood as 'skill' or 'ability', in other words, 'performance'. However, Daines' observations are helpful in drawing attention to the differing traditional emphases of teachers and speech and language therapists. They suggest a focus for professional development for the two groups of practitioners if the potential for collaboration is to be realised. Each group will need to understand how their views colour their working practices and how they may interact with each other. The need to perform acts as a stimulus to competence-learning. Competence underpins performance.

Daines has recently suggested (personal communication) that the revised attainment target of speaking and listening, which emphasises Standard English, can be seen to have resulted in a helpful change of focus. Specific language skills such as fluent speech, vocabulary choice and grammatical awareness are now identified. Daines sees this as a stronger focus on 'competence' which can be useful when trying to identify particular difficulties in speech and language and in targeting help. It may provide opportunities for a greater link between the work of therapists and teachers.

The emphasis on 'differentiation' of teaching to meet individual needs more effectively since the introduction of the national curriculum in England and Wales (National Curriculum Council, 1989) may also suggest a more analytical approach to the

underpinnings of learning and teaching. Where language difficulty is experienced, by a pupil or teacher, modification of the linguistic environment would be an important pedagogical strategy. The language of instruction would be 'differentiated' through alternative ways of presenting tasks and by accepting varied modes of responding. Lewis (1991) provides a wide range of suggestions for teaching and learning strategies for pupils with special needs. With reference to language, these include suggestions that children who can not write may speak their responses into a tape recorder or illustrate them. She draws attention to the potential for misunderstandings of teachers' expressions in classrooms and cautions teachers about synonymous expressions such as 'add', 'add on', 'increase'.

Summary

This chapter has presented some of the issues for those who work with pupils described as having speech and language difficulties and sets the evaluation study in context. It provides indications of some of the main content areas of the course, but suggests too that the material may not be satisfying to students who wish for facts and clear answers. A professional development course in this field will need to engage teachers in critically reflecting on the nature of their work and of the difficulties experienced by the pupils. The study will suggest that distance education can be particularly appropriate in addressing these crucial issues because of the way in which it can be linked with day-to-day practice.

Whilst clinicians continue to attempt ever-finer categorisation of the presenting difficulties, it is acknowledged, even by those who attempt medical explanations, that

'The mainstay of management of children with DLD (developmental language disorders) is education' (Rapin, 1996 p651)

The range and extent of speech and language difficulties, whether considered to be 'delay', 'disorder', 'specific' or 'secondary', raises concern for education. Speech and language difficulties and other special educational needs are a problem for schools and

for teachers as much as for pupils. There is a clear rationale for further professional development for teachers in this field because of the wide acceptance that speech and language difficulties exist and the fact that statements of special educational need are being written which focus on difficulties with speech and language. The growing body of knowledge about language and language impairment must therefore be made available to teachers.

Although this study is not specifically concerned with the professional education of speech and language therapists, this chapter has identified some of the differences between therapists' and teachers' approaches to language and language difficulties. The work of these two groups of professionals must be collaborative if the needs of children are to be met effectively. The establishment of speech and language difficulties as a focus for concern and the identification of different approaches to the difficulties has implications for the provision of professional development opportunities for teachers and therapists. This study mainly considers provision for teachers but the interactive nature of the work of the professionals means that there are implications for therapists and for the ways in which speech and language difficulties are construed. In the next chapter, the provision made for pupils with speech and language difficulties will be discussed, giving further support to the case for professional development for practitioners in the field.

CHAPTER 3: PROVISION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

Introduction

This chapter continues the theme of the last in providing the context for the course which is evaluated in this study. Statutory responsibility for provision for children with speech and language difficulties in the UK lies with both health and educational services. There has also been increasing involvement of the voluntary sector in lobbying for, and providing services. The chapter discusses the work settings of practitioners who initially became students on the distance learning course.

A review of provision suggests that children with speech and language difficulties will be found within a wide range of educational settings, a range which is currently developing and changing as the wider educational world responds to social and political influences. The two main forms of specialist settings, language units and special schools are discussed in this chapter. It is noted that one of the weaknesses of so-called specialist provision is the lack of specially trained teachers.

The chapter reviews some of the issues surrounding teachers' preparation for special education. The decline in emphasis on special educational needs at all levels of teacher education is considered to have reached crisis point. Support for the development of the course evaluated in this study is provided as the chapter describes how teachers have had few opportunities to gain specialist skills and knowledge for speech and language difficulties. A full-time course at the University of Reading ran for only seven years and left a gap which partly created the impetus for the development of the distance education course discussed in this study.

Arguably, more important than the settings, are aspects of education which can provide appropriate teaching and learning for pupils with speech and language difficulties.

These provide an essential focus for the course content and in doing so, raise issues about the nature of collaboration between teachers and therapists. The overlapping roles of teachers and speech and language therapists is a particular feature of this area of special education. It raises one of the questions for the evaluation study, that is, what are the implications of the course for speech and language therapists? The employment of therapists is considered in the chapter because, in providing opportunities for teachers to specialise in speech and language and to enhance their skills in working with the pupils, therapists may be affected.

Educational provision for speech and language difficulties

Until the early 1970s, specialist provision for pupils with speech and language difficulties was virtually non-existent and it was noted that many of the pupils, prior to that time were placed in other specialist provision, for example for partially hearing children or for those at that time described as 'educationally sub-normal' or 'maladjusted' (Hegarty, Pocklington and Lucas, 1982).

Local policies and practice have always varied, which adds to difficulties in obtaining a national picture of the present educational provision for children with language difficulties. Currently changing views and, perhaps more significantly, changing funding arrangements, for all children with special educational needs, continue to influence the patterns of provision. The heterogeneous nature of language and communication difficulties means that they are likely to be seen throughout the range of educational provision.

Language units

According to Cranmer (1992), where special provision is made, probably the most frequently-found type for children with speech and language difficulties is the language unit or class. The first unit for children with speech and language disorders was set up in 1965 (Donlan, 1986) Following this, there was a steady growth in this type of provision

with, what Hutt and Donlan, in their survey of language units (1987), describe as an 'especially surprising' steep growth between 1980 and 1985, in view of the categorical nature of language unit provision in contrast with the broader notion of special needs supposedly developing following the Warnock Report (Department of Education and Science, 1978). Hutt and Donlan noted that there had been some powerful lobbying and direct financial support by parents of children with language disabilities which seemed to have influenced the increase in provision. Hutt and Donlan's survey indicated that the largest number of language unit places was available to children of infant school age. In 1986, at the time of the survey, 654 places were in infant units, 349 places were in junior units and 39 places were in the secondary age group. Since many nursery units were operated by health authorities, they were not included in Hutt and Donlan's survey and they concluded that 'a wide ranging survey at this age level is much needed' (Hutt and Donlan, 1987 p6) In 1987 it was reported that language unit places had grown to around 2000 (Cranmer, 1987). The provision of secondary units was limited in spite of a need created by pupils leaving junior units and considered unable to join a mainstream class. The effect of the limited provision, according to Donlan was to force children 'into educational categories defined by existing resources' (Donlan, 1987 p46).

In their critical review of the development of a language unit, Pocklington and Hegarty (1982) found the lack of continuity to secondary level an unsatisfactory aspect, saying that it was to be regretted that the unit

'does not form part of a comprehensive plan to cater for the educational needs of children with speech and language disorders from infancy through their school careers' (p75)

More recent information lists 356 centres of 'provision' for speech and language disordered children, without stating the number of places available (I CAN, 1994). The list has mostly language units with some special schools. 40 centres of secondary provision are mentioned, suggesting some increase since 1987.

Information from Scotland indicates an increase in provision between 1990 and 1994 but suggests there is a mixed picture (HM Inspectors of Schools, 1996). The majority of places for pupils with language and communication disorders were made at primary school level (237 full-time and 38 part-time). Only 11 places were available at secondary school. However, places were also available in schools for moderate learning difficulties and other special schools. Further, the figures include some pupils with autism. This may not be inappropriate as communication may be their main need but, as frequently happens in the field of speech and language difficulties, a clear picture can not be obtained and the complexity of issues is again highlighted.

The advantages of special units are argued because a number of pupils with similar needs are grouped together and effective use can be made of the time and expertise of specialist teachers, therapists and other professionals. If, as is usual, the unit is situated within a school, then the facilities of the main school should be available (although this is not always the case) and the pupils and teachers are likely to have contact with their mainstream peers in various ways. However, as with any special provision, there will be disadvantages. Children may live at some distance from the unit, necessitating special travel arrangements, for example, by taxi. Children who are specially transported to school may lack contact with their neighbourhood peers, although this may not, in fact, be realistic because of the negative effects which language difficulties have on children's abilities to socialise (Armstrong, 1993a). Many children who experience language difficulties lack the tools of language required to develop skilled social interaction. Rice, Sell and Hadley (1991) described children with language difficulties in their study as a 'social subgroup' whose limited communication skills put them at risk for the development of social competencies.

Two voluntary organisations with special interest in children with disabilities of communication, together provided guidelines for the development of language units (Association for All Speech Impaired Children, 1988; I CAN, 1988). The aim of a

language unit, according to the guidelines, was to combine the curriculum with a specialised language teaching approach. Such an approach should be provided by a specially qualified teacher and a speech therapist. Other staff recommended for this provision are non-teaching assistants, a named educational psychologist and a 'reliable cover teacher' who 'may not be specially qualified but who must be realistically and regularly informed about expectations...'. The guidelines indicate a need for training for language unit and mainstream teaching staff with opportunities also for training for non-teaching assistants and the development of multi-disciplinary training courses for staff.

There can be advantages in assembling resources so that a number of pupils can together take advantage of expertise which can help them to access the curriculum. However, this is countered by the negative aspects of separating groups of pupils, who supposedly have similar 'problems', so that their main daily contact is only with each other and not with children with a range of abilities. The realities of this type of provision suggest a number of additional disadvantages. Firstly, the staffing of units does not usually reach the ideals recommended by AFASIC and I CAN. In the study by Bruges, cited above,

'the principal difference between the language units and any other good remedial unit is the availability of regular speech therapy' (p87).

There is no mention of teaching staff with specialist knowledge or skills to work with severe language difficulty. In examining the provision of special education in London, the Fish Report (ILEA, 1985) expressed a belief that in the field of speech and language disorders, practice would be enhanced where teachers and therapists worked together but that there were very few special education teachers with specific training in the field. The literature and experience suggest that the majority of language unit teachers have general experience and may have a high motivation to work with children with language disabilities. They may also have attended short courses on various aspects of language and language difficulty. Many language units still can not claim to provide specialist teaching and personal communication from teachers in such posts indicates that they

have often spent two or three years developing an understanding of the nature of the children's needs before feeling that they can be effective.

In surveying the unit provision for children with speech and language disabilities, a problem is evident in establishing consistent criteria for the selection of children. It is reported (Bruges, 1988) that in one education authority there was discrepancy between educational and health service views. Educational professionals saw educational need as the prime consideration for placement of children in a language unit whilst speech therapists 'saw their support for the language units as justification for bringing in children who would benefit from regular or intensive speech therapy' (p86). There was not always agreement on the educational implications of speech and language difficulties or of the educational objectives of speech and language therapy.

Inconsistencies of selection were also found in Scotland. In a survey (Working Party of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists, 1988) the characteristics of a large percentage of the children in units did not match up with the admission criteria agreed and many of them showed other significant difficulties in addition to language. Hutt and Donlan's (1987) survey concluded that

'32% of the units stating criteria described the problems presented by some of their pupils as incompatible with those same criteria' (p8).

14% of their sample had no entry criteria. Of those stating criteria, only 45% included the requirement of non-verbal ability within the average range, which was recommended in guidelines. These observations may be accounted for in a number of ways: they reflect the various models informing the understanding of speech and language difficulty by different professional groups; they may endorse Bruges's (1988) comment on the differing aims of educationists and therapists for language units; they may also reflect the observation that difficulties in communication are a feature of many types of special educational need.

Some education authorities attempt to assemble together children whose difficulties appear to be either homogeneous or which readily divide into working subgroups (Lambert, 1987). Discussions with teachers working in language units suggest that the children often have very varied language skills. Further, the attempt to bring together children with similar types of difficulty can mean that wider social and curricular needs may be ignored. A group can comprise children varying in age, presenting significant challenges to a teacher attempting to plan the curriculum and wider experiences at the appropriate level for each child.

Integration and language units

There are wide variations in practice for children with language difficulties joining with their peers in school. Mobley (1987) points out that by its very nature speech and language difficulty can have far-reaching effects on a child's cognitive and social development so that there can be no generalisations about integration of children from language units with their peers. Amongst Mobley's observations of integration from language units was that frequently, physical education, music, games or crafts were the lessons chosen for integration. However, she suggested that these may be particularly unsuitable due to the problems which many children with language difficulties have with rhythm and coordination.

Donlan's survey of language unit provision (1986), examined patterns of integration of children into ordinary schools and found the following main distinctions:

1. Split site provision where children attend part of the week at their local school and part at a language unit
2. Units offering substantial social integration but no significant classroom integration
3. Units offering social integration and some limited classroom integration. This was the pattern found in the majority of provision.
4. Units offering social integration as well as classroom-based time.

Apart from the first example, the units constituted classes in a mainstream school with the children as full members of the school. In the first example, pupils are given the specialist help available in a unit and the opportunity to receive education with their peers and local friends. However, this type of arrangement inevitably involves an amount of travelling and a potentially disjointed experience of education. Education on two sites for pupils with specific difficulties in communication may be particularly confusing and lack consistency of people, places and experiences. There appears to be no attempt to provide even the 'locational integration' of education on the same site as other children, described by the Warnock Committee (Department of Education and Science 1978).

The situation of children in examples 2 and 3 carries with it difficulties identified by Mobley above. There is little evidence that children with speech and language difficulties cope better in 'social' than in 'academic' situations and, in fact they may have specific difficulties with social integration. Donlan refers to the 'torment of playtime for some children with speech and language impairment, whose response may be self-absorption or aggression' (1986 p81).

Donlan's survey was undertaken before the introduction of the National Curriculum in England and Wales and the situation in his fourth example, the 'functional integration' proposed by the Warnock Committee, should now be more common, since all pupils, at least in state schools, have the right to the same curriculum. The recent introduction of the Code of Practice (Department for Education, 1994) has required individual educational plans for children with special needs so that teaching and learning goals are explicit and appropriate for the particular child. There are implications however for the understanding that teachers must have. In particular, teachers need to be aware of the specific language needs of the pupils. Peers too, will need preparation and guidance if children with language disabilities are to be included in the full range of activities available in school.

Effectiveness of units

A few studies have attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of language units using various parameters to measure success. Although criticising many of the procedural aspects of the setting up of a unit and finding that many of the organisational difficulties persisted two years after its establishment, Pocklington and Hegarty concluded that

'Foundations have been laid for providing an appropriate education for a group of children whose needs have hitherto been largely ignored'. (1982 p80)

In 1986, Turner and Vincent reported a retrospective analysis of the populations of 'one of the longest established Units of its kind in Britain' over eleven years. The overall conclusion from a sample of 60 children was that they 'do improve'. The biggest gains were seen in pupils with articulation and expressive language difficulties, followed by those with comprehension difficulties. The age of admission of pupils to the unit did not appear to be a critical factor in gains achieved, neither did the length of stay in the unit. The authors suggest that, contrary to accepted opinion, positive effects are seen evenly at all ages and do not favour only early intervention. With reference to entry characteristics of unit pupils, Turner and Vincent noted that boys and girls were in a ratio of 3:1 and that 'girls have to have more severe needs to qualify for inclusion' (p39).

In 1987, Locke reported that

'personal experience leaves us in little doubt that language units are effective; children who had previously been at a standstill begin to make progress, sometimes very rapidly' (p58)

However, she continued that 'hard evidence is difficult to find'.

The review of language unit placements in Avon, referred to above (Bruges, 1988) concluded that children did benefit from their placement and that their subsequent achievements were better than expected. As with other studies, Bruges criticises the

facility for inconsistency of criteria for entry and was unable to establish which aspects of unit provision were most valuable or which aspects of the children's difficulties responded best to the help offered in units.

A case for early admission to language units is made by Stone (1992), who suggested that the longer admission was delayed, the more likely the child was to fail in mainstream school. Her follow-up study of 59 pupils from a language unit looked at their educational and employment careers. She reported that 47 returned to mainstream schools whilst 12 transferred immediately to special schools. Eventually, six more of these transferred from mainstream to special provision. Many of her respondents expressed a need for ongoing support after leaving the unit and, as in other studies, a recommendation was made for educational support at secondary level. Stone described the respondents'

'air of unease about a general lack of understanding of the effects of severe language disorder and how it has a continuing influence upon self-esteem and self-confidence, even though positive progress may have been made in the ability to communicate' (Stone, 1992 p297).

As with all educational provision, positive aspects were countered by disadvantages. An overall conclusion on the unit provision was that

'pupils and parents, generally speaking, appreciated the fact that the Unit provided a more sensitive environment in which to address individual needs, even if, at times, the pupils may have seemed to be somewhat over-protected (p299).

Grove, Conti-Ramsden and Donlan (1993) report that children with language and reading disabilities lacked persuasiveness, lacked social influence and social acceptance, resulting in their opinions having little influence on their classmates' decisions in situations with children whose language was not a concern. Their study suggests that language units can provide the children with more positive conversational experiences with peers. They also point out the negative experiences which may result for children from units on transfer to mainstream classes, confirming the need for careful management of integration processes.

Special schools

Educational provision for children with severe communication difficulty may also be made in a special school. The first school for children with severe language disorders was established at Moor House, in Surrey in 1947. By 1965, there were reported to be three such schools and by 1985 the number had increased to 17, providing for approximately 600 pupils (Hutt and Donlan, 1987). The schools are in both the maintained and non-maintained sectors of education and provide residential and day-attendance. Proponents of this type of provision suggest that

'It will probably always be necessary to retain a few residential special schools for those children whose problems are so profound that they need protection from the demands of the normal community until they have developed some learning strategies together with some insight and maturity for survival' (Byers Brown and Edwards, 1989 p159).

It is not too difficult to understand this view when the lack of specialist support in ordinary schools is considered. Many of the features claimed as positive aspects of the special schools might be equally successful if mainstream provision was flexible enough to meet the needs of the widest range of pupils. However, as Cooper and Ideus suggest, in the context of pupils with emotional and behaviour difficulties,

'...it is possible ... the child's organic and psychological problems are of such a level of severity that the modifications to the environment necessary to enable the child to function effectively are not likely to benefit the majority of the children' (1995 p109)

A similar point may apply to some pupils with language difficulties and decisions about placement of pupils will always require a fine balancing of the needs of individuals and groups.

The schools claim to provide specialist teaching and usually employ directly a larger number of speech-language therapists than are found in other settings. There is however, no more likelihood that teachers in these settings will have had opportunities to gain

particular knowledge of speech and language difficulties in any formalised way. Whilst there could be a positive aspect in the provision of intensive, specialist teaching and therapy for the pupils, there must also be consideration of the disadvantages of residential schooling. Curriculum opportunities may be limited as are opportunities for pupils in such schools to experience aspects of education and general family and social life with others who do not have impaired language.

Two studies have evaluated the response of pupils to education in special language schools:

Lea reported in 1986 that Moor House School was in a unique position of being able to gather information from ex-pupils up to forty years of age. He cites follow-up studies from that school in 1969, 1981 and 1984. The 1984 study examined the situations of 14 ex-pupils, ten of whom had been in the follow-up study reported in 1969. The report is complex, focusing on many aspects of the pupils' communication skills and their personal and social lives. Lea's main conclusion is that

'given appropriate (his underlining) help children with severe speech and language disorders can grow up to lead happy, useful and independent lives' (p244).

His definition of 'appropriate' is

'early diagnosis followed immediately by appropriate treatment, which includes speech therapy, remedial education and whatever else is needed in the way of orthodontics, plastic surgery, ENT advice and treatment. Treatment must also include an appropriate setting (unit or school) which can provide:

- a) the staff expertise necessary
- b) an integrated speech therapy, teaching and social programme
- c) the comfort and reassurance of being with other children who have similar problems
- d) in cases where school and home situations are unsatisfactory, a chance to draw away and 'start again'. There is little doubt that the majority of children at Moor House School would not make the progress they do, were they not in a residential setting' (p244).

There are debatable points in Lea's conclusions. His definition of 'appropriate' does not need to relate solely to residential special schools as any of his criteria could be applied

in other settings. Neither would everyone agree that grouping pupils with similar problems will provide 'comfort and reassurance', or indeed, that these are essential objectives.

In a longitudinal study from Dawn House school for pupils with a variety of language difficulties, Haynes and Naidoo followed up 118 who had left the school, on outcomes based on language, speech and reading measures. On a combination of the outcome components, 32% were deemed to have good outcomes, 35% had fair outcomes, 33% had poor outcomes. Haynes suggests that 'appropriate and intensive help' contributed to progress and success of the pupils but that almost all of them experienced persisting language difficulties which affected scholastic achievement, work prospects and social life (Haynes and Naidoo, 1991).

In the course evaluated in this study, support is not given for any one type of education. It is accepted that pupils with speech and language difficulties will be found in a wide range of educational settings and that course members will be representative of this reality. The course aims to help teachers to understand the nature of speech and language difficulties and to plan effective educational experiences according to need.

Teachers and speech and language difficulties

Professional development for special education

It is suggested that the desire to learn is intrinsic to professionalism since a professional is

'one who continually seeks mastery of the branch of learning on which his occupation is based' (Jarvis, 1983 p27).

Continuing education, ranging from self-generated activities of an individual to formally organised, award-bearing courses, is therefore essential to any professional group. All professions have their specialist branches. In the case of teaching, as special education

can be defined as that which must be provided 'over and above' what is usually available for pupils, so certain areas of knowledge and skill will be over and above what is expected of all teachers (Special Educational Needs Training Consortium, 1996). They must therefore expect professional development opportunities which equip them to take on particular roles and tasks.

The Advisory Committee for the Supply and Education of Teachers (ACSET) reported in 1984 on Teacher Training and Special Educational Needs, recommending that such training should be post-basic and that specialist courses at an initial training level which existed then, should be phased out. However, it was also suggested that all initial teacher education should include some work on special educational needs. This should include 'sufficiently detailed' awareness of child development with a core element including knowledge of physical, cognitive, emotional and social development of children (p8). There was no specific mention of knowledge of language development.

There have been a number of calls, over the years to equip teachers for particular responsibilities by providing specialist training. All teachers, at the basic level of competence need to be aware of a range of pupil abilities. Additional competence in special educational needs should continue to develop during their career. However, it is unrealistic to expect all of them to have detailed knowledge or be experts in all aspects of education. The Warnock Report (Department of Education and Science, 1978) stated that in principle all teachers with defined responsibilities for children with special educational needs should have an additional qualification in special education. This view was endorsed by Wedell (1985) who proposed that resource teachers should have particular specialisms and by Fish (1985) who suggested that initial training could only provide an introduction to special educational needs and that this would need to be followed by in-service training. Hegarty and Moses (1988) suggested that such training would be either 'multi-specialist', covering a variety of issues in special education, or

'single specialist' focusing on a particular type of special need or particular activities in special education. The implication would be that

'Each school should therefore have some members of staff who are able to advise colleagues, act as consultants on methods and materials and to know where to find additional help outside the school' (Smith, 1993 p156)

The 1980s saw a decline in the opportunities for teachers to undertake courses, particularly those offered full time. In initial teacher education, provision of information on special educational needs was reported to have become patchy, dependent on availability of qualified tutors (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, 1990b). There was a 'gradual attrition of opportunities for teachers to study for award bearing courses' and no 'coherent policy for staff development for teachers' (Mittler, 1993).

Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) in 1990 replaced a system of national and local priorities in special education so that local authorities had to bid to the Department for Education for a proportion of the cost of a variety of training priorities. Inconsistencies in requirements mean that some teachers must have a specialist qualification for teaching in certain areas of special education, that is teaching in schools or units for pupils with visual, hearing or multisensory impairment (although not if working in an advisory or peripatetic post). Work with pupils with learning difficulties, emotional or behavioural difficulties or speech and language difficulties for example, has no such requirement.

Various changes in funding arrangements during a period of changes in education in England and Wales have affected numbers undertaking development opportunities in special education to the point where, in 1993, a Special Educational Needs Training Consortium (SENTC) was set up to address a perceived crisis in the availability of specialist teachers. The Department for Education appeared to acknowledge the difficulties by providing funding and requesting recommendations from a SENTC

working party in 1995. The initiative was probably also influenced by other changes which focus on the provision for pupils with special educational needs, for example new inspection arrangements for schools and the introduction of a Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (Department for Education, 1994). Many of the recommendations of the working party resonate with those described above. The working party endorsed the belief that

'every teacher is a teacher of pupils with special educational needs' (Special Educational Needs Training Consortium, 1996 p47, para 5.2).

It also recommended that

'all teachers with designated responsibilities for pupils with SEN should possess, or be working towards the acquisition of, recognised competencies and qualifications in special needs education' (p47 para 5.6).

Language and communication difficulties were amongst the areas of SEN provision where it was recommended that specific continuing professional development was required to develop appropriate competence in teachers.

Competence and professional development

The notion of competence is fundamental to professional practice and has become familiar in the UK in recent years particularly through the work of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications. It is also influencing thinking in higher education and in practice-based learning. Competence has been criticised as overly-focused on skill and performance, without necessary emphasis on underlying reflection and thinking. Hyland (1994) has specifically criticised emphasis on competences for this reason in the context of the education of teachers. Whilst accepting and endorsing some of the criticisms levelled, there can be value in adopting the concepts of competence if it is interpreted in the widest sense. Competence can be understood as 'what a person can do well' or 'what we can see' when a person carries out their work. In professional practice there can be no competence without knowledge or understanding. Indeed, basic professional competence is usually considered to comprise knowledge,

understanding, attitudes and skills. In work with children with speech and language difficulties, Roulstone (1994) described stages on the way to the development of professional 'expertise' of speech and language therapists: competence is the performance observed in a learner who continues to 'stick to the rules' and is only in the early stages of being able to select from a wide range of possibilities. Problem-solving is systematic and organised but still somewhat inflexible. Flexibility develops as the practitioner becomes 'expert', relying more on internalised knowledge and intuitive thinking. A similar pattern of development may be applied to other practitioners. Schön's (1983) descriptions of the 'reflective practitioner' are clearly relevant to expert practitioners who are able to utilise their own theories developed over time and to deal with the unexpected. Competent professional practitioners will therefore always reflect on action.

Teachers' professional development for speech and language difficulties

Although educational provision for pupils with speech and language difficulties increased from 1980 onwards (Donlan 1986; Hutt and Donlan, 1987; Cranmer, 1987) there were few opportunities for teachers to gain the expertise needed to work with them. Hutt and Donlan (1987) reported that many of the teacher-participants in their survey of language units commented that training opportunities were much needed but not available. Their finding is endorsed by a number of studies in both special and mainstream settings. A study by Hand (1985) noted that the confidence of mainstream teachers to work with pupils with speech and language disorders increased where they were allowed to consult with a specialist teacher or speech therapist. Locke suggested that training courses must direct teachers to examine the curriculum objectively and must show them how to organise it for children who were not learning in the normal way. She believed that

'input during initial teacher training was often inadequate and not always the most appropriate to help the teachers to deal with some of the children's (language) problems encountered in the classroom' (Locke, 1987 p67).

Glover (1988) investigated the views of language unit teachers on their need for specialist training and found that, prior to being appointed to language units, most teachers had a special interest in language development, however, they frequently found that the difficulties they met while working with the children did not conform to their theoretical models and they began to search for more effective teaching methods. In addition, an unexpected finding was the number of teachers who stressed the need for good inter-personal skills and that this should feature in a course. A project jointly-funded by a health authority and a local education authority looked at the development of in-service training on speech and language for teachers in mainstream education (Anderson, Constable and Graham, 1990). The authors reported that overwhelmingly teachers wanted to be given practical suggestions that would help them support a child in a mainstream class. The next most popular topic concerned the nature of communication disorders, followed by the relationship between verbal language, reading and spelling.

Few opportunities have existed for teachers to gain expertise in the field of speech and language impairment, or indeed, to obtain knowledge in any systematic way. For a number of years there has been a course at the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne but this relies on local teachers to attend the campus-based course and normally recruits no more than ten students. Apart from this provision, the majority of teachers working in the field of speech and language disability gained their knowledge from short courses or from other professional colleagues in the work setting.

A major initiative was the diploma course in Remedial Language Studies (DRLS) which started at the University of Reading in 1979. However, many applicants were unable to obtain secondment from their posts to attend the course and over seven years, only thirty-seven teachers gained the diploma. In their final report on the course, Crystal and Davison (1985) drew several conclusions about future training needs of teachers. They noted that there was a 'major gap' in teacher training which needed to be filled if provision for children with 'special linguistic needs' was to be satisfactorily implemented.

Crystal and Davison suggested that alternative models to the nine-month full-time course should be investigated and training by distance education was suggested. Their recommendations played an important part in developing a case for the distance learning course now under discussion and diplomates from the Reading course played a part in the development of its curriculum (see Introduction to Part 2).

Provision of speech therapy

The education of pupils with speech and language difficulties is somewhat unusual in that two distinctive professions need to work collaboratively and regularly together. It is difficult to find a similar example in other areas of special education, or indeed, in education in general. The overlapping practice of teachers and speech and language therapists provides a particular feature of this evaluation study. It is therefore helpful to review briefly aspects of the speech therapy profession in order to provide additional contextual information for the study.

Historical background

The development of provision for children with 'speech defects' was, according to the Warnock Report (Department of Education and Science, 1978), 'delayed by lack of qualified staff' (2.52). The provision in the early days was made by the relatively new profession of speech therapy. Between 1949 and 1954 the number of speech therapists employed by local education authorities increased from 205 to 341. The number of practitioners (since 1991 called speech and language therapists) registered with the professional body in 1995 was between five and six thousand. A review of the employment of speech therapists and the development of the profession shows implications for the support of children with speech and language difficulties. Currently approximately 70% of speech and language therapists work with children (Enderby and Emerson, 1995) although not necessarily in educational settings because many will be in health-based pre-school services.

Unlike in some other parts of the world, where speech therapists are medically qualified, the profession in the UK does not, at least in constitutional terms, uphold such a strong allegiance to the medical profession or to medical points of view. In its early stages of formation, in 1943, the College of Speech Therapists made an approach to the Association of Teachers of the Deaf with a view to forming a joint organisation. However, the proposal was rejected as the teachers of the deaf

'preferred separate organisation because of the disparity which they considered to exist between the academic standards of the two professions and because they felt that each already provided a sufficient area of specialisation' (Department of Education and Science, 1972 p9).

It is not stated where the academic differences lay or why separate specialisation was desirable but an opportunity may have been lost to integrate areas of knowledge and skill which are indisputably overlapping.

When, in 1959, the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Bill was introduced (later to become the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act, 1960), speech therapists were included at its first reading but opted to be excluded from the final reading as the profession considered that it might lose some of its autonomy and that educational developments in the profession might be hindered. The Bill covered professions in which doctors were responsible for the prescription and general supervision of treatment. Government consultation with professions in the health and education services has not been prominent in recent years and it is unlikely that a group would have the same opportunity to opt out today should such legislation be proposed. However there was strength in the profession's argument that at the time, only 20% of speech therapists were employed in the hospital service. The remainder were employed by local education authorities. The Committee of Inquiry into Speech Therapy Services, the Quirk Report, (Department of Education and Science, 1972) recommended that the organisation of speech therapy services should be unified and no longer employed by both Education and Health. Although the Quirk Report did not recommend the nature of the unification,

in 1974, when the National Health Service underwent a reorganisation, speech therapy services became the responsibility of the National Health Service. So, although the profession had opted not to be 'supplementary to medicine', illogically, in view of the large numbers who work with children, the main employer was to be the Health Service. Whilst a unified structure for the profession was considered preferable by many of those presenting evidence to the Quirk Committee, there is still discussion within the profession on whether unification under the employment of health authorities has always been to the advantage of children with speech and language difficulties. The fact that teachers and therapists have different employers can negatively affect the services to children.

'among the many factors which militate against an integrated service for the language-disordered child, this administrative division is outstanding' (Byers Brown and Edwards, 1989 p168).

Therapists in the 1990s

Recent developments have not been helpful in reducing professional divisions. Changes to the law were made following a ruling in 1989 (*R v Lancashire County Council*, 1989) which accepted that speech therapy was an educational provision. The resulting paradox in the law was that where a health authority, the legal provider, could not provide speech therapy, then the education authority was obliged to do so if therapy was written in a child's statement of special educational need (Department of Education and Science, 1992). No increase in funding was made to education authorities for this purpose, except in Scotland, where the Secretary of State, who was responsible for both health and education, gave six million pounds for the provision of speech therapy for school children. Funding was later also provided there for a detailed examination of services for children with speech and language difficulties (Reid, Millar, Tait, Donaldson, Dean, Thomson and Grieve, 1996). Amongst the conclusions was the need for a shared framework between education staff and therapists in working with speech and language difficulties. In England and Wales, to add to the confusion, there was

evidence that many speech therapists assessing a child's needs for a 'statement' were unaware that speech and language therapy should or could be written in the section describing 'Educational Provision' and continued to write it as 'other' provision.

The introduction of the Code of Practice (Department for Education, 1994) might have clarified the situation. However, instead it endorsed the confusion by stating that speech and language therapy may be regarded as either educational or non-educational provision, depending on the circumstances of each individual case. Further, it stated that whilst it was the responsibility of health services to provide therapy, if they did not do so then the 'ultimate' responsibility lay with education authorities (Department for Education, 1994, Para IV:34). The lack of clarity and guidance is arguably one of the most unsatisfactory aspects of the Code of Practice (Miller, 1994).

Therapists in education

There is a will amongst therapists who work with children to improve the situation. In an attempt to address some of the issues, speech and language therapists working in education met for a Policy Review Forum in March 1993. The introduction to the report of the Forum stated that

'In terms of the number of children affected, it (working in education) may be the major issue' (for the profession) (College of Speech and Language Therapists, 1993 p7).

Some of the main conclusions of the forum were:

Therapists were keen to maintain a comprehensive professionally-managed service and conceded that the National Health Service would continue to be the main employer.

There was a strong desire to work cooperatively with others in education and for teachers and therapists to undertake joint professional development.

More information should be disseminated on good working practices.

There should be open access to speech-language therapy services and they should not be built solely around statementing and recording procedures.

Some of these points would indeed help to develop better services for school children but there are currently obstacles in the health service which affect satisfactory arrangements for schools. However, it is likely that many therapists would not see educational employment as ideal either. There is a dilemma in wanting to be professionally managed whilst wanting to work in schools managed by head teachers. The report of the Scottish study (Reid et al 1996) concluded that many of the current disadvantages of working in health could be dealt with in the contracting arrangements between education authorities and speech and language therapy providers or at the level of arrangements between individual therapists and schools.

Collaborative practice for inclusive education

The special provision described above inevitably caters for only a small proportion of pupils with the most severe difficulties. Although very little literature supports the impression, it is assumed that the majority of children with speech and/or language difficulties are educated in mainstream schools. Further, many speech and language difficulties may not be identified but the pupils may be thought to have other learning difficulties or to present difficult behaviour. Many of the implications of rapid changes in educational legislation are still unclear but if there are increased opportunities to include a wider diversity of pupil abilities, more and more teachers will encounter children with special speech and language needs in their mainstream classrooms. In educational terms, the priority should be for the child to have the opportunity to benefit from a 'broad and balanced curriculum' (Department of Education and Science, 1989). As this is now, since the introduction of the national curriculum in England and Wales, their legal entitlement (Department of Education and Science, 1988), all provision should be arranged with a view to achieving that aim. Whilst all pupils, at least in state schools, share a common 'national curriculum', the way in which it is structured and presented varies according to individual needs, and this must include linguistic needs. There is a need for both teachers and speech and language therapists to be conscious of

the way in which the curriculum can be a vehicle for the development of language skills (Armstrong, 1993b).

It is a reflection of changing views of special education that the unit guidelines referred to above, by AFASIC and I CAN (1988), have become outdated and given way to new 'Principles for Educational Provision' (AFASIC and I CAN 1996). The new document acknowledges that provision takes a variety of forms without promoting a specific approach. There is a need to examine in detail aspects of the different practices of including pupils with a range of difficulties in ordinary schools and to examine how children described as having speech and language difficulties are managed in a variety of provision. However, attempts to include all pupils may 'be very penalising to those very children it purports to help' and 'depends for its success on excellent support services' (Byers Brown and Edwards, 1989 p158). If a pupil's special needs for language support are to be met, there are implications for the provision of teachers, the availability of speech-language therapy and effective collaboration between teachers and therapists. All of these are important themes in the research reported in this study.

There are suggestions that since the late 1980s, speech and language therapy services have become more responsive to the needs of pupils in mainstream schools. The forum organised by the College of Speech Therapists, described above, and the publication of professional standards for therapists (College of Speech and Language Therapists, 1991) have endorsed schools as a legitimate setting for practice. This has to be balanced against the ambiguities in the Code of Practice (see above) which can have negative effects on the funding of therapy for schools. Increasingly however, therapists and teachers are working together in mainstream schools, endorsing the view that therapy may be seen as 'an integral part of school life' (College of Speech and Language Therapists, 1991 p59). The professional standards provide clear aims for collaborative practice between therapists and teachers.

Shaw, Luscombe and Ostime (1995) describes changes in a service where work in schools by speech and language therapists had been 'minimal'. A re-evaluation led to reorganisation so that all children would receive their therapy in school. Assessment of the changes highlighted a need for two-way training, teachers expressing a need for greater knowledge and skills for work with speech, language and communication difficulties and therapists needing more knowledge of educational issues.

Similar changes are described by Roux (1996) in one London education authority when special schools were closed and more children with statements of special educational needs were accommodated in mainstream schools. Newly qualified speech and language therapists were given the opportunity to work in these schools, which had often been thought more appropriate for experienced staff. However, Roux suggests that staff at the beginning of their careers may be more open to learning to work collaboratively. A support system for the therapists was implemented and included meeting their needs for a wider knowledge of curriculum and teaching issues and continuing to develop collaborative skills to work with teachers.

Collaboration is not always straightforward and there are continuing difficulties ascribed partly to the fact that the two groups of professionals have

'limited knowledge of each other's specific skills, knowledge base and intervention assumptions' (Norwich, 1990 p118).

Norwich suggests that there are also 'quite distinct' professional cultures between teachers and speech-language therapists which contribute to the difficulties. Experience suggests that the 'cultures' arise partly from the educational and health contexts in which they are situated. Therapists and teachers are 'brought up' differently and socialised during their initial professional education to think and work in different ways. The expectation to work with the processes of individual therapy may be incompatible with educational goals in classrooms. The operational models of speech and language

difficulty discussed in Chapter 2 will lead to different ways of thinking between therapists and teachers.

In a study comparing teachers, doctors and nurses, teachers were the least well informed about speech therapy and the scope of therapists' work (Lesser and Hassip, 1986). Although the situation may currently be changing for the better, therapists are also ill-informed about educational philosophies and the work of teachers. A study jointly funded by health and education to examine speech and language therapy services in schools concluded that

'scope for improving channels of communication at all levels was identified'
(Jowett and Evans, 1996)

Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter ranges widely across professional and educational matters. Whilst understanding in the field of speech and language difficulty has been changing rapidly in the last two decades, professional development opportunities for teachers to gain expertise in this field have been grossly inadequate. Combined with this, the employment of speech and language therapists by the health service can restrict the effectiveness of provision for children with speech and language difficulties in educational settings. A review of the main types of special provision for children with language difficulties suggests that an important obstacle to effective education may lie in the lack of opportunities for teachers to gain special knowledge, skills and understanding for the work and to collaborate with therapists.

The publication of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (Department for Education, 1994) underlines the philosophy of inclusive education, assuming that wherever possible, pupils will be educated in mainstream schools. Additionally, the publication of professional standards for the

speech and language therapy profession suggests an increased will to improve its services to schools (College of Speech and Language Therapists, 1991).

Together with the concerns raised in Chapter 2 on the nature of speech and language difficulties, this chapter provides a clear rationale for improved professional development for teachers of children with speech and language difficulties. The innovative use of distance education for this purpose requires a wide ranging evaluation. The next chapter will consider methodological issues in exploring this type of professional development and the methods chosen for the research reported in this study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter focuses on available methodologies for research and a description and rationale for the methods used in this study. A broad view of research is taken, based on Stenhouse's concept that research is systematic enquiry made public (Stenhouse 1975). The reasoned choice of methods to explore various aspects of the distance education programme supports this concept. The study is made public through this written work, publications arising from it and other writing associated with the course.

The methods selected for the evaluation study aim to explore the following questions:

What are the main processes in the development of the innovative approach of distance education for professional development in special education?

What are the particular implications of the processes and outcomes of this distance education course for teachers and speech and language therapists?

How can the processes be understood for further development and evaluation of similar enterprises?

The first and third questions were present from the beginning of the evaluation. The second emerged during the evaluation.

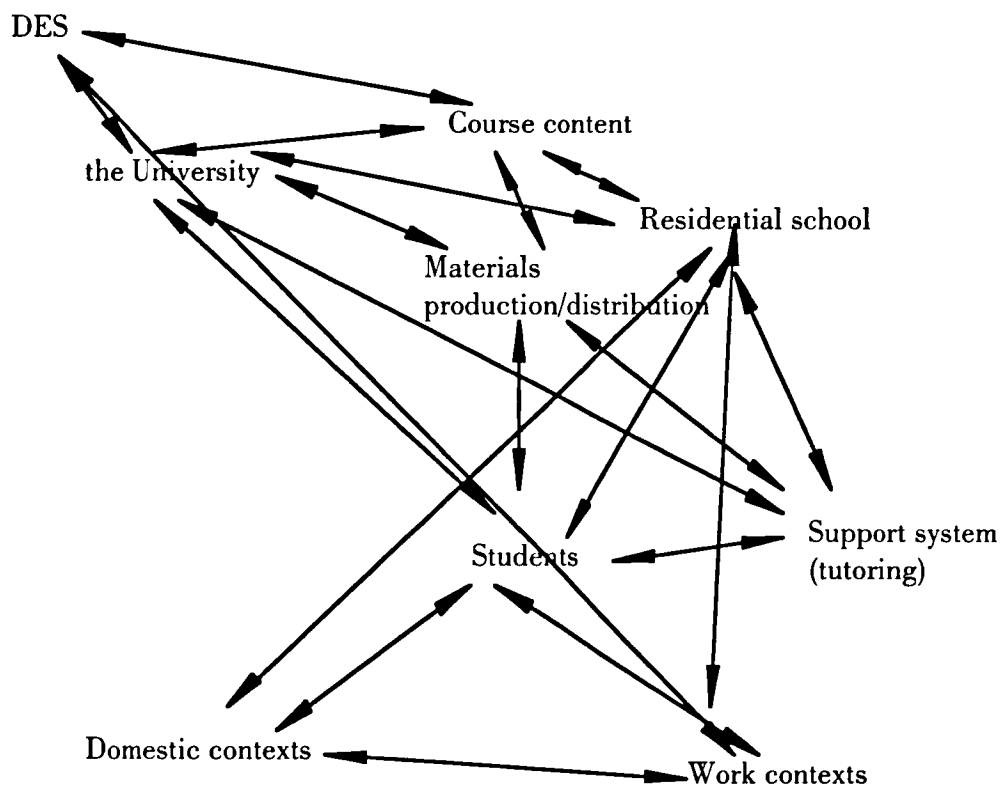
Interactive systems

The complexity of the links between different elements of the professional development course suggests an interactive system. It requires a methodology which explicitly aims to assist understanding and to

'provide a conceptual framework within which many different aspects of problem situations can be accommodated' (Checkland 1981 p313)

Methods are needed which bring the themes of the research together, that is distance education and professional development within the context of a course in speech and language difficulties. The methods are used to explore the interactions between the themes and to examine practical and theoretical outcomes. An initial 'mind map' of the salient aspects for evaluation demonstrated that no part could be viewed in isolation but influenced and was influenced by, every other aspect. Figure 4.1 shows the main elements of this 'mind map'.

Fig 4.1 Mind map of essential elements of the evaluation



The concept which links all aspects of this study is the notion of interactive systems, an approach which considers the hierarchical and interactive nature of humans and their

activities. The planning and preparation of the course can be described as *systematic*, that is, it followed a 'plan or explicit and rational procedure' (Open Systems Group, 1972 p18). It proceeded stage-by-stage towards the setting up of the course and went forward along a fairly straight track until the first students registered. However, as the course was launched and began developing, a *systemic* view came to be seen as helpful. At this point, the course becomes more dynamic with an increasing number of interactions with external factors, the political environment, personal and professional settings of the participants which stimulate reactions unanticipated in the earlier stages.

Systems approaches

Total systems approaches or systemic views originally developed from cybernetics and communications theory. 'Self-regulating', 'closed' systems were exemplified by structures such as central heating systems and machines in which the whole depended on each component and each small part could only function within the total structure. Most authors cite Von Bertalanffy in the 1940s as the initiator of the idea of 'open systems' relating to human functioning in social organisations and activities, such as families, schools and businesses. These systems are in constant interaction with their wider environment (Checkland, 1981).

'each level of the hierarchy is stacked or embedded in the next level; for instance, a single person is the highest level of the organismic hierarchy from cells to organ systems, and at the same time the lowest level of the social hierarchy' (Norwich, 1990 p31)

The overall function results from series of interrelated and interdependent parts, all of which are critical to the system's maintenance This is an appropriate view of a course which has essential, interrelated elements.

Dowling (1994) suggests that this leads to a view of events in terms of *how* a phenomenon occurs rather than attempting to ask *why* or to look at cause and effect. In the present study, interaction is not only between people but between people and the course and within different settings. Understanding the processes of interaction between a student's

involvement with the course materials in the particular context of their work will be more productive than attempting to see why a particular part of the course 'works' or does not work. The focus on interaction means that communication (between elements) is an essential feature in the maintenance and development of systems (Campbell, Draper and Huffington, 1988).

Early views on systems thinking in education suggest that in order to understand aspects of teaching and learning, it is helpful to think of schools for example, as sub-systems which operate as parts of bigger political, social or economic systems (Hodge, 1970). Bateson coined the term 'ecosystem' to convey the interactions of all elements in an environment (Bateson, 1973). In this study, schools, or educational services, together with aspects of the course are amongst the components of the ecosystem.

Systems approaches to distance education

In distance education, systems approaches have been applied to the planning and operation of courses and institutions. In the early stages of planning of the UK Open University, consultants in 'instructional systems' were appointed to propose and develop its operating structures, based on 'primary functional activities' (Neil, 1970). A 'general interaction model' of the 'major subsystems' of the University was drawn up which included the business activities, the academic components and all of the related design and production aspects and the relationships between them. However some important differences between early systems approaches and more recent developments, with reference to distance education, are noted by Sewart (1993). He suggests that more appropriate analogies are now with the organism or the brain rather than machine-type systems. Distance education systems now need to be more open and flexible. There are important interactions with the external world and the system needs to be adaptive to the challenges and opportunities which the environment presents. This is particularly pertinent to distance education in professional settings, such as the example in this study, where sub-systems are important elements, which themselves are complex.

Richey (1992) draws an analogy between a systemic approach and an orchestra where many players are involved in simultaneous performance. The activity is 'creative' and there is 'no one best move'. In this study, the 'best move' is different for each individual and for the same individual at different times. It involves consideration of their personal-psychological responses and the circumstances they are in, together with a complex range of course matters. It is critically important, particularly where adult learners are concerned, that the system includes, not only course content, but takes into account the social milieu of the students. Where courses specifically aim to enhance professional practice, this is particularly applicable.

Qualitative and quantitative approaches

The challenges posed in studying a course raise questions about the nature of research and the methods available for it. Contrast is often drawn between a 'traditional scientific' approach, which attempts to predict and measure phenomena and other approaches which describe and interpret. The so-called 'scientific approach' is also termed 'quantitative' because of its focus on measurement and numbers. Distinctions between the approaches lie in the extent to which prior theorising engenders the research. Broadbent, Laughlin, Shearn and Dandy (1993) suggest that this will be either 'high', 'medium' or 'low' and because the social world is complex, 'only 'skeletal' generalisations are ever possible' (p156) in social science research. Low to middle-range theorising is therefore appropriate and detailed empirical data form an important aspect of the research. In the development and evaluation of the course, there were no 'theories of courses' or pedagogical theories to test for teachers of children with speech and language difficulties. Any theory would have to develop when there was some information about the course and the responses to it. Theoretical perspectives in this study are therefore 'grounded' in the data. The concept of grounded theory was proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in the context of research in the social sciences. Initial decisions about

the topic of research are not based on a pre-conceived theoretical framework but on general ideas about a subject or problem area.

'The theory develops as different categories and their properties tend to become integrated through constant comparisons that force the analyst to make some related theoretical sense of each comparison' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 p109).

Furthermore, because the theories emerge from the views of the participants, in this case the teachers, it is suggested that they have a special contribution to make to teaching and learning and to

'minimise the credibility gap that has sometimes been discussed in relation to educational theory' (Cooper and McIntyre, 1995, p181)

In the evaluations of the course, themes and theoretical perspectives emerge which are connected with each other and which may be particularly relevant to positive and negative outcomes of the course. These are woven in to the study as it proceeds.

Qualitative research in education

In education, qualitative studies of innovative schemes, curriculum and practice have gained importance since the 1970s. According to Norris (1990) these were a reaction to the psychometric tradition which had prevailed. The concepts of grounded theory are apparent in the 'illuminative' approaches (Parlett and Deardon, 1977) which began to legitimise qualitative studies as multi-faceted, descriptive approaches which took account of a wide variety of responses. The present study endorses their observation that the 'untidy reality' of educational studies does not give rise to 'tidy results'. An illuminative project sets out to study (or throw light upon) an innovative programme to see how it operates, what influences it and what it is like to be a participant. The methodology aims to be adaptable and eclectic so that a variety of methods is typical and may occur in one study. The study of this course went through the stages suggested by Parlett and Deardon: observation, inquire further, seek to explain.

Qualitative approaches have some of their roots in systems thinking and the word 'system' is explicitly used as a central concept in discussions of illuminative evaluation (Parlett and Dearden, 1977). The core task of evaluation is to examine the interactions between the 'instructional system' and the 'learning milieu', which are analogous with Emery and Trist's (1960) sociotechnical system (see final discussion). The instructional system comprises the pedagogic assumptions of a course, its syllabus and methods; the learning milieu is the social-psychological and material environment in which students and teachers interact. The diversity and complexity of the learning milieu forms an essential element of the evaluation. Connecting changes in the learning milieu with intellectual experiences of students is one of the chief concerns for illuminative evaluation. Thus many aspects of a programme may not in themselves be totally unique. However, the way in which they interact with other aspects and with the particular systems in which the students operate may provide new insights. The systemic notion is apparent in the observation that

'The introduction of an innovation sets off a chain of repercussions throughout the learning milieu. In turn these unintended consequences are likely to affect the innovation itself, changing its form and moderating its impact' (Stenhouse, 1975 p113).

Importantly, as this type of evaluation depends on qualitative study, rather than hypothesis-based research or outcome evaluation, it is possible to appraise some of the ways in which the programme realised not only initial objectives but the extent to which it also realised other goals. A systemic view broadens options. Evaluation based only on objectives set at the start of a study can be limiting.

Perhaps most particular to this type of study, in contrast with quantitative research, is the positive value given to personal views and subjective reports. Information can and must be collected and recorded systematically and every effort must be made to report accurately and to be aware and explicit when bias is likely. Also, flexibility is necessary

if opportunities are not to be lost when new possibilities arise from information collected.

Grace describes this type of research as

'propelled by a dynamic interaction between the researcher and the research setting' (Grace, 1990 p23).

Case study

The subject of this study is a course, from the stages of its conception in the minds of individuals, to the present when it has gone through early development and continues to evolve. In research terms, it is a 'case' to be described, scrutinised and evaluated so that decisions can be made about aspects of it. Case study is familiar to many professionals who work with people. In speech and language therapy, the background from which the researcher comes, case study is introduced early to develop skills in close examination of individuals, their context and features of their communication. The resulting report of a case study usually shows a variety of aspects, building up a picture of a person, with particular characteristics emphasised according to the purpose of the study. This case study of a course is similar, examining a range of interactions and interrelationships using the best information available and promoting understanding of the course. Because the study is evaluative, it is essential that as many perspectives as possible are obtained and information can be of practical use in leading to further development. With particular reference to distance education, case study is proposed as a method which could

'provide a mechanism by which the complexity of a dynamic system can be analysed as a whole and generalisations propounded' (Minnis 1983 p194)

A variety of methods and research tools is required. The task cannot be organised as a neat experiment with a simple before and after result. A course involves people, who all have different expectations and experiences of it. In this study, an attempt is made to explore perceptions, opinions and feelings of individuals rather than attempt to accurately measure their reality.

Until the mid-1980s quantitative methods predominated in distance education. Distance often influenced the methodology, which relied on

'postal survey questionnaires using closed-ended questions with the range of options determined by the researcher' (Morgan 1984 p254).

In contrast, the philosophical position of qualitative methods acknowledges

'the complexity of the student and his or her ability to reflect upon experience' (Morgan 1984 p254).

In this study, information from postal questionnaires was supplemented by data from interviews, the majority of which were conducted by telephone in order to ensure representation of views (see below).

The study as action research

The first stage of the case study was an investigation of teachers' needs, the findings of which formed the basis of a course (see Introduction to Part 2). More importantly, the study was a source of information for further development and therefore had practical value in suggesting action to be taken if the course was to remain useful. Additional questions arose as the evaluation proceeded and subsequent activities of the study addressed the new questions. The approach to the study largely took the form of 'action research'.

'a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out' (Carr and Kemmis, 1986 p162).

It arose from Kurt Lewin's view of the

'artificiality of splitting out single behavioural elements from an integrated system' (Checkland, 1981 p294)

Action research is practice-based and largely dependent on qualitative methods, although quantitative measures are not excluded. It is compatible with ideas of grounded research as understanding and theoretical concepts can develop from the process of inquiry. The process links individual action with the context in which it is performed and it has become an important model in the development of practice in education, where it is often linked with the 'teacher as researcher' movement (Elliott, 1994). In this study, the introduction of a new professional development course in a university needed to be closely linked with the environment of schools and teachers' work contexts. Development could not wait until a final summative evaluation was complete, which anyway could probably never be achieved. Implicit in adopting action research for course evaluation is the view that there is always room for improvement (Lomax and Cowan, 1989). The approach does not provide for final standards of performance and is often viewed as a continuing spiral. Its potential is also therefore political

'its aim is to change, and change is bound to affect some part of the institution in which the research is located' (McNiff, 1988 p141).

There are links between action research and the concepts of 'reflective practitioner' discussed by Schön (1983). Schön's view of experienced professionals is of individuals able to reflect on their actions. Through reflection, personal theories of practice can be identified and the practitioner is in a position to continually test and revise these. The processes of action research therefore can be understood as motivated by inquisitiveness in reflective practitioners who wish to improve their knowledge and their practice. It reduces the boundaries between theory and practice. In the study, action research was attractive as a way of investigating my own practice in developing the course. It is as much about my own learning as it is about students and systems of the course. It allowed methods which were responsive to particular features of the course and to participants as they reacted at different times. The study provided an opportunity to examine and develop teaching and suggests a way in which the two, sometimes conflicting, activities of teaching and research can be integrated productively.

'Universities have often been more concerned with the learning of their lecturers (through research) than with the learning of their students (through teaching)'. (Rowland and Barton, 1994 p373)

Links with systems theory are evident and indeed, there is a view that action research is the appropriate methodology for the examination of systems (Checkland, 1981). The repeated cycles separately and together affect people.

'Action research looks at whole phenomena and promotes change at the system level' (Taylor, 1994 p145)

The implication is that changes in thinking and changes in practice will have systemic effects as any change in one person or part of the system will inevitably affect other parts.

Triangulation

Throughout the study, responses were sought from as many participants as possible in order to see the course from several different viewpoints. Before setting up the course, suggestions for its content were obtained from advisers and academics in addition to teachers who would be potential course participants. Evaluation of the course was undertaken by seeking the responses of students and tutors. The students varied greatly in the amount and type of professional experience and presented a range of widely differing views. Views were sought by different means: questionnaires, interviews, systemic thinking activities.

The attempt to establish different view points in research is known as 'triangulation'. Walker (1985) suggests that the term was coined by Webb and colleagues in 1966 and is based on a belief that multiple perspectives provide a more useful picture of social phenomena. The aim is not to search for 'truth' but for people's perspectives on situations and to accept these as valid. Miles and Huberman (1984) call triangulation 'a state of mind' in which there is a self-conscious decision to double-check findings

using a number of sources and methods. In this study some quantitative data were obtained from questionnaires, from which consensus views in people's attitudes to the course could have been assumed. However, narratives in questionnaires and the discourse of interviews provided additional and different data which had to be considered if a more honest and realistic picture of the course was to be obtained. Development of the methodology as the study progressed permitted new perspectives to be taken. Mathison (1988) suggests three major goals of triangulation: providing evidence from different sources about a single phenomenon and enabling a single point to be made about some event or phenomenon; highlighting inconsistencies in data so that several perspectives are provided on the same subject; producing contradictory data. All of these were accepted as possible and were necessary to the illumination of aspects of the course content and process. Coldeway (1988) suggests that triangulation is particularly relevant to the research problems in distance education because of their complexity which is often compounded by 'interlocking variables'.

Selection of 'subjects'.

The teachers played a vital role in the case study which examined interaction of the course users with the course materials and other critical elements. In large studies, researchers are usually expected to have representative and probably randomly-selected 'subjects'. However, 'participants' or 'collaborators' are more appropriate in the present study. These terms reflect a process in which people's responses are valued as essential sources of information. They also suggest that there is less control by the researcher over the information provided. Tessmer (1993) suggests that an evaluation study should have access to information from a range of learners but then goes on to discuss some of the difficulties in their selection. In selecting from a range of learners, this might mean for example, making decisions about different abilities, different experiences, different ages. The wide range of experience, ability and needs of teachers in the study would make any such selection impossible. Every participant is different and it would be extremely hard to draw inferences about the group of students from individual comments. Furthermore,

it proved impossible to influence their selection. The study relied on the willingness and interest of others to participate. The respondents in all parts of the study were self-selected. The use of triangulation is an attempt to meet the challenge of obtaining responses and some of the methods used were an attempt to increase participation. For example, the use of the telephone (see below) ensured that interviews could be undertaken when travel to meet with people face-to-face was not possible. Although self-selected, the respondents represented a wide range of learner experience as evidenced by the polarities between their views.

The design of the study

The research design spanned a period of three years, using information from three cohorts of students and a small group of tutors. Decisions about what to specifically explore, and with which groups, were made during the course of the action research as information from responses was incorporated into the project. It was important to be mindful of the risk of expecting responses on too many aspects of the course from a single group. The responses to the early content-focused questionnaires (see below) raised a number of issues and questions which provided themes for the later elements of the research.

Evaluation of distance education materials, through postal questionnaires (Appendix I), was initially planned and undertaken with the 1990 and 1991 cohorts (30 and 27 students respectively) taking the Diploma in Education, Speech and Language Difficulties. Consequent upon these responses, modifications were made to some of the materials and as part of the action research design, further responses were then sought from the third (1992) cohort (25 students).

At the end of their two year course, the views of students in Cohort 1 were also sought on their reaction to the course as a whole. This was again via a postal questionnaire (Appendix II). Responses were received from 27 students and, in order to pursue in

greater depth the themes identified in these responses, in-depth telephone interviews were conducted with 15 people who had accepted the invitation to take part in more detailed discussion.

Evaluation of the tutoring system was a component of the end-of-course questionnaires to Cohort 1. More detailed evaluation of this area was undertaken, via a postal questionnaire, in the second year of Cohort 2's studies. Additionally, four of the seven tutors to Cohort 1 agreed to be interviewed.

Because links with the workplace had been identified as a prominent issue by the first two cohorts, Cohort 3 was additionally asked to participate in a systemic thinking activity (see below) in the second residential component of their course. This issue was pursued further using a postal version of the activity with Cohort 2 in the final weeks of their programme.

Two members of the first cohort and one from the second cohort were selected and agreed to be interviewed face-to-face following completion of the course. This provided the opportunity to check whether the researcher's analysis of responses from the three cohorts was borne out by the experiences of 'successful' students. As noted in Chapter 9, these students were selected because of their progress to Masters level. However, as a broader evaluation of student experience, it might have been valuable to have included interviews with a student who did not transfer and with one whose comments indicated a less positive experience. This would have indicated whether, notwithstanding their less successful outcome, they endorsed the researcher's interpretation of the impact of distance education on practitioners.

Data gathering methods

The main sources of data for the evaluation were: postal questionnaires; interviews conducted by telephone and face-to-face; two 'systemic thinking' activities, one conducted in a 'live' session with students and the other by post.

Figure 4.2 gives a time line for the gathering of the data, from three cohorts of students.

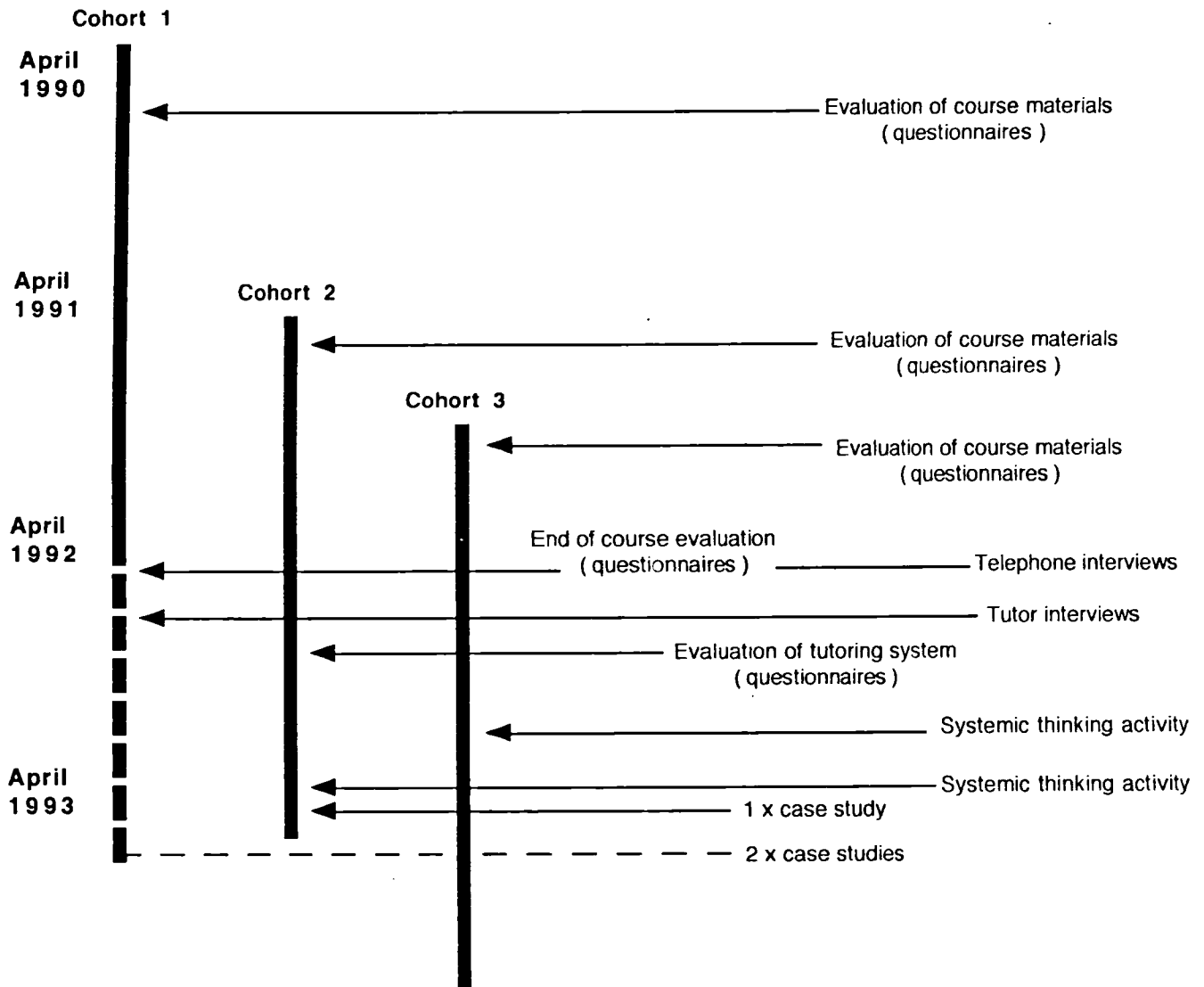


Fig 4.2 Schedule of research activities

Questionnaires

Edwards and Talbot (1994) suggest that the process of uncovering information in the research process is like the peeling off of onion layers. Questionnaires can be used to approach the outer layers. In this study, questionnaires were used as an initial means of obtaining broad information. In each of the questionnaires, a combination of quantitative and qualitative information was sought. The questionnaires were characterised by questions requiring yes or no answers or position statements or ratings on a Likert scale with which respondents should agree or disagree (Oppenheim, 1992). In addition, questions were interspersed with blank spaces to encourage respondents to 'say more' in elaboration of their responses.

Data from three questionnaires is presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. They were as follows:

Evaluation of materials

The purpose of these questionnaires was to assess responses to the material presented in the course modules. All students from the first two cohorts were asked to complete evaluation questionnaires on course materials during their two years of study. A copy of this questionnaire is included as Appendix I. It asks questions about the level of difficulty of the course material and the workload it generated. Students were also asked to rate levels of novelty of information in the materials and relevance to their practice.

Overall evaluation of the course

All students from the first cohort were sent a questionnaire aimed at gaining a picture of their overall perception of the course and its usefulness to their practice. A copy of this questionnaire is included as Appendix II. The questionnaire first asked factual questions about students' age, pre-course qualifications and their work settings. They were also asked to rate the overall workload and level of difficulty of the course and to remember any exceptional aspects; they were asked to rate the usefulness of tutorials and residential components; a series of questions (questions 8-13) asked the teachers to

reflect on their experience of theory and practice in the course and how they believed their thinking and practice had changed since undertaking the course; particular topics, identified in the initial survey of needs (see Introduction to Part 2) were listed and teachers were asked to rate how well topics had been covered; the final question asked whether the teachers would choose distance learning again as a means to professional development.

Evaluation of tutorials

The second cohort of teachers were sent a questionnaire aiming to assess their response to the tutorial arrangements. A copy of this questionnaire is included as Appendix III. It asked about the professional background of the tutor, number of students in the group, whether or not teachers tried to attend all meetings, the length of their journey and the location of the tutorials. From a list, generated by discussion with tutors and students, respondents were asked to identify the activities undertaken at tutorial meetings and to rate their usefulness. The management of the tutorials was explored by asking how the agenda was set and the teachers were asked about contact with the tutor and with other students outside of the planned tutorials. Finally, the teachers were asked to summarise what they saw as the purpose of the tutorials.

Although many authors caution against their use, where there are practical considerations of distance, lack of time and numbers of people, these can often be partly overcome using postal questionnaires. Amongst the disadvantages of questionnaires is the inevitable superficiality of information obtained; return rates may be low and the responses may be linked to the motivation of potential respondents and, in some studies, to their literacy levels. However, in spite of the disadvantages, questionnaires can be useful in obtaining some levels of information. The responses led to the decision to probe still further into reactions to the various aspects of the course, through interviews.

Interviews

Interviews were an important source of information. Their immediate and 'live' nature makes possible clarification of questions and responses not possible in a written questionnaire. The use of specific skills by an interviewer can help an interviewee to explore ideas and to think aloud. Experience of the phenomenon of 'I don't know what I think until I hear what I say' can be used in research interviews to help individuals to reflect on their experiences. The majority were conducted by telephone but the three individual case study interviews (Chapter 9) and interviews with tutors (Chapter 5) were conducted face-to-face. The use of interviews provided opportunities to explore in more detail and from new perspectives, topics which had been raised or had spontaneously emerged from the questionnaires. The planning of interviews was therefore dependent on questionnaire responses and aimed to address new issues arising in the research. Because the questionnaires elicited from students, comments about their colleagues' involvement in the course, this was explored through the interviews. In the interviews for the three case studies, the theme of support and involvement was specifically raised as it had recurred throughout the data from questionnaires, telephone interviews and systemic thinking activities (see below).

The relationship between the participants

Research interviews can range from examples in which the conversational partners are well known to each other to those in which they are complete strangers. Whatever the case, the researcher must be aware of the nature of the relationship with the interviewee and the possible effects this may have. 'Role' forms an important concept in the consideration of relationships and social structures (Merton, 1970). In different social contexts individuals hold a variety of roles which have associated behaviours and which will meet with different expectations and responses from others. In the present study, amongst the researcher's roles which might be relevant to the evaluation of the course were university tutor, researcher, speech-language therapist, woman. In each interview, the participants will have perceptions and pre-conceived views of each other which will

affect their behaviour towards each other. Where the interviewer is an 'insider', the situation under investigation holds some familiarity with known people. There can be advantages and problems in this 'auto-ethnography' (Hockey, 1993). Familiarity may lead to some loss of objectivity on the part of a researcher. It may be difficult to stand back from the situation and to see it from a perspective of distance. Too many aspects of a situation may be taken for granted and it may be difficult to ask questions about situations which are already familiar. On the other hand, Hockey suggests that an insider may have a rapport with informants which may be lacking in a stranger. There may be certain linguistic and cultural familiarity which enables the researcher to understand the situation and interactions more readily. Advice is often given to retain some distance and objectivity when conducting studies in familiar settings. This advice however, is applicable to any research and the insider should perhaps simply be more aware that there may be greater risks of reduced objectivity in their position. An element of prejudice has to be acknowledged in qualitative research. It was clear in this study, as Grace (1990) suggests, that the understanding gained from any aspect of qualitative studies can only be the starting point for further exploration.

Previous knowledge and preconceived notions of what is required by an interviewee can affect the content of information given. They may say what they think the interviewer wants to know. The likelihood of continued relationships after the event will also affect the conduct of an interview, at least to the extent that 'one is anxious that interviews should not be a socially unpleasant occasion' (Platt, 1981 p77). In this study, interviewees were all volunteers and may have had a particular reason for offering to participate. The teachers who offered to be interviewed may have been especially keen to please. Oppenheim (1992) suggests that some people are motivated by flattery in being invited to be interviewed. Others will see the request as an intrusion. Interviews have been described as 'a challenge that may be seen as a threat' providing new insights for some but too revealing for others (Hoffman, Baruch and Serrano, 1988 p3). Those who did not volunteer may not have had a positive experience of the course and may have

wanted no more to do with it because of its stressful and exhausting nature. Willingness to participate in the research may have been related to the teachers' emotional responses to the course. For some it would be difficult to say honestly what they thought of the course, to the course tutor. Further, the respondents were required to set aside personal time, which may indicate their motivation for the task. The interviews can not be assumed to give a totally unbiased view of the course because of the self-selection of the respondents. They provide one aspect of a multi-perspective evaluation.

The telephone in research interviews

Most literature appears to assume that interview participants will sit down together for an extended period. Practical circumstances suggested that an alternative would have to be found for this study. The teachers had undertaken their course by distance education because a campus-based course was unviable. They were thinly, and not evenly, spread across the UK. To see each of the sixteen teachers who had expressed willingness to be interviewed would have involved extensive travelling and considerable expense, on an unfunded project. In the particular circumstances, the telephone seemed to offer a suitable alternative. Distance education is dependent on effective communication networks. Postal systems are still probably the most essential and in many examples, the telephone also plays an important part.

In spite of the increased use of electronic communication, there seems to have been little change since 1988 when Dicker and Gilbert noted the lack of literature on the use of the telephone for detailed interviewing. They considered the use of the telephone for educational survey research to be an innovation. Dicker and Gilbert described the use of the telephone for the purpose of gaining rapid and detailed responses to questionnaires in an evaluation of educational resource materials. The conclusion of these authors was that the telephone provided a 'successful and fruitful' means to evaluation.

There are reports that the telephone can be useful in surveys, for example for market research. In a book devoted to the subject, an extensive list of advantages is presented and concludes

'no other technical or procedural innovation, with the exception of the computer, has made as significant an impact on this type of data gathering as the telephone' (Frey 1983 p9).

Comparing the use of the telephone with written questionnaires, Frey points out that in telephone conversations, active participation is required whereas, subjects may refuse to respond in writing. 'Thus, whatever the question, respondents will provide an answer' (p17).

Sykes and Hoinville (1985) compared telephone with face-to-face interviews in a survey of social attitudes. They found little evidence of difference in response even to what might be defined as 'sensitive' or potentially problematic questions. They noted that 'The particular challenge is the speed at which to progress through the questions' (p57). Similarly, Harvey (1988), in a review of literature related to survey data collection, concluded that telephone research was feasible. Her main observation was that telephone interviews have to be shorter in length than in-person interviews and have to have less complex questions. Each of these reports focuses on telephone surveys using interviewers unknown to the respondents, which may affect the speed of interview and length of responses.

As far as the costs of interviews are concerned, Sykes and Hoinville (1985) suggest that the costs of telephone and face-to-face are about equal, taking into consideration the costs of travel and interviewer-time. More recently Fidler (1992) suggested that in considering postal questionnaires, telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews for data collection, the telephone seems to lie in the middle in terms of cost and response rate. However, considering that potential interviewees may be located anywhere in the

world, arguments about costs of travel versus costs of telephone become redundant. The telephone must be more viable.

There are still few reports of the telephone as an interview tool. One of the few is Nias's (1991) report on using the telephone to interview people too far away to visit in research with primary school teachers. She considered that these interviews yielded a good deal of valuable data but gives little detail on the practicalities of this form of interview, apart from saying that she made notes during the conversation. The report does not suggest whether respondents were prepared for her call or whether any other preparations were undertaken. Nias's conclusion was that some people found it possible to talk more freely because she was not physically present.

The telephone in distance education

The telephone is used in distance education as an alternative to meetings between tutor and student. Robinson (1982) reported that where students are isolated the telephone can be useful and saves travelling time and costs. In the Open University's guidance, some of the particular features of telephone communication are contrasted with face-to-face conversation (Robinson 1982). For example, partners in telephone conversations are denied information gained from eye contact and gesture available in live conversation. Distance education tutors are advised to develop awareness of their own tone of voice and conversational skills in the context of telephone calls. Use of pauses and silence may be interpreted differently and can appear longer than the gaps in face-to-face conversations. The tape recording of telephone tutorials is suggested as a means of self-monitoring by the tutor. A number of these characteristics could similarly apply to the telephone interview.

Development of the telephone interviews

The bias suggested by Dicker and Gilbert (1988) in only using telephone owners in the interviews does not apply in this study, since there were no non-owners of telephones in

the student group. The teachers used the telephone as their main means of contact with the University, their tutor and other students, although individuals varied in the extent to which they used it. From the beginning, use of the telephone was encouraged. Before joining the course, applicants all received a telephone call, in order to make contact with them and to clarify matters relating to the course.

A considerable amount of preparation for the telephone interviews was necessary. Prior to the interview, the participants were written to, informing them that the interviews would be conducted by telephone and that they would receive a call to arrange a convenient time for the interview. It was made clear in the letter that they would need to set aside about half an hour for the interview. Following the call to arrange the interview, they were sent a copy of their completed post-course questionnaire. The prior arrangement of a mutually convenient time resulted in a high contact rate and 15 teachers were interviewed. Only one of those who had volunteered could not be interviewed as he wrote to say he had a long-term illness. This response is more successful than that of Dicker and Gilbert (1988) who, on the whole, did not pre-arrange their calls and reported a 48% non-contact rate.

All calls were arranged for when the teacher was at home, in the evening or during half-term. All calls were recorded, using a Phonelog Datam telephone answering machine in which a blank audio cassette tape was substituted for the usual message tape. A microphone, designed to record from the telephone, had previously been purchased but was found not to be suitable for recording from the particular telephone system in the University, from which the calls were made. The recording from the answering machine was of excellent quality and the only minor inconvenience was a bleep occurring every fifteen seconds, designed to remind speakers that the call was recorded. Respondents were forewarned about the bleep at the beginning of the conversation. It rarely interfered with the quality or content of the recording.

Steps needed to be taken to ensure the interview conversation remained focused and purposeful. The presence of the completed questionnaire assisted and served to impose a structure on an interaction which otherwise was informal and ranged freely within the boundaries of the questionnaire. The main strategies employed were the use of brief open questions, prompts, reflections back and paraphrases to the interviewee of ideas they had expressed. The teachers' attention was drawn to a questionnaire item and they would be asked to 'say more' about their response. Vocal responses communicated continued attention and interest. In face-to-face conversation this might be indicated non-verbally by head nodding and facial expression. There were, inevitably, differences in the extent to which the conversations were 'tightly focused' as this was subject to variations in individual conversational and communicative style. The balance of quantity of speech between the interviewer and interviewee varied to some extent but it is likely that there would be similar variations in face-to-face interviews as some respondents will always be more verbose than others. In all cases, examination of the transcriptions showed that the interviewer said very little in comparison with the interviewees, who spoke a great deal. The telephone interactions appeared largely to mirror their face-to-face counterparts, that is, people used a similar style of interaction in their telephone and face-to-face conversations. Thirty minute tapes were used and only in two cases did the interview exceed the tape length. It is possible that face-to-face interviews would have taken longer and that the length of these telephone interviews may be affected, as observed by Harvey (1988) and by Sykes and Hoinville (1985), by a greater speed of conversation. This may result from either fewer pauses or from briefer turns in the interactions. Powney and Watts (1987) suggest that the less a researcher defines the context of the inquiry and declines to offer a focus for the informant, the higher the risk of irrelevant material. In this case, the focus of the interview conversation was assisted by the presence of the completed questionnaire. The length of these interviews is also likely to have been influenced because respondents had already partly answered the questions on paper and were not responding 'from scratch' in the telephone interviews.

Oppenheim (1992) suggests that

'in most ways, the problems of telephone interviewing tend to be very similar to those that are encountered in structured interviews in general' (p99).

Whilst this may apply to the content and process of the interview, the practical aspects of planning and management of telephone interviews must be different and particular care may be needed for their success.

Perhaps advance preparation is always advantageous to both parties to an interview. Both participants will agree the time and the place of the interview. On first consideration, this may seem to be more necessary in face-to-face than in telephone interviews but pre-booking of calls is more likely to gain a response. It may go without saying that the interviewer will to some extent plan an interview according to the nature of the research. However, interviews may be more successful if the interviewees are also prepared and aware of the subject area which will be the focus of the interview. In these interviews, the written questionnaires were helpful in keeping the conversation on target and assisting shared understanding between interviewer and interviewee. It is possible that although face-to-face interviews can be successful if unstructured and free-ranging, this is less likely of in-depth interviews by telephone. A person may set aside an afternoon for a face-to-face interview but this is unrealistic if the interview is by telephone. Long pauses, which may be a sign of active thought and acceptable when facing someone, can lead to conversational death in a telephone interaction.

Writing notes is always difficult in interviews. In face-to-face situations, the communicative process may be lost if full attention is not given to the interviewee. The telephone interview presents challenges in grappling with earpiece, pens and paper whilst actively listening to maintain a coherent conversation. The technicalities of recording live and telephone interviews are also different. It is relatively simple to switch on a tape recorder and ensure that the microphone is in place for a face-to-face

conversation. Participants quickly become used to the presence of this machinery. Before recording telephone conversations some further equipment may be necessary. Although new technology is available, it is advisable to be familiar with its operations before embarking on the interviews. Further, it will be even more important to ensure that interviewees are made aware and are reminded that they are being recorded during a telephone interview.

The literature has been somewhat dismissive of telephone interviewing, regarding it perhaps as a minor variation of face-to-face discussions. This study suggests that telephone interviews are a specialised type of interview and that they require considerable thought before they are undertaken (Miller, 1995) If carefully carried out, telephone interviews may enable researchers to obtain data from people who would not otherwise come into the body of collaborators in research and who therefore would not have their views represented. This may particularly apply to distance education research.

Transcription of interview tapes.

The whole of each interview was recorded and transcribed before analysis. Although it varies according to purpose, transcription of recorded speech is always a laborious activity requiring careful and repeated listening if vital parts of the conversation are not to be missed. There will always be a measure of interpretation in transcription. Stubbs (1983) described 'auditory hallucinations' which occur when transcribing and notes how whole words can simply not be heard even after repeated listening. One person can sometimes transcribe at first hearing a phrase that a colleague has failed to make sense of after listening to it 50 or 100 times. The participants in a recorded interview may also be able to transcribe elements which are indecipherable to others who were not present. In this study, as the main purpose was to examine content from the transcription, the conversations were written in full with each turn starting on a new line. The interviewees were given a copy for verification and to modify or add to what was said at the time.

Despite the overwhelming volume of material in transcription there can be advantages in seeing interviews written in their entirety. At the most basic level, it was possible to see who spoke most in the interview and to have something on which to base decisions about whether to delete or include data.

Systemic thinking activities

A strong theme emerging from questionnaires and interviews was the teachers' perceived link between their experience of the course and their work with colleagues in schools. The action research approach to the study allowed additional investigation of this by developing activities which had not been planned at the start of the investigation. Activities were designed to elicit teachers' thoughts on their roles and relationships at work and how the course was believed to have affected these.

The activities were run at the summer residential component in 1993 for the third cohort of students, then beginning their second year. These aimed to discover more about colleagues' reactions and involvement in the course whilst at the same time attempting to raise the students' awareness of how they might use the course more in their work context. In order to consider 'systemic issues', it is necessary to identify the 'focus group', that is the collection of significant, interacting people (Plas, 1986). A session was planned entitled 'Taking the course to work', run by a colleague experienced in working systemically with families and organisations. The objectives of the session, that it should be an educational activity for the teachers and a means of obtaining research data were explained. Following explanation of systemic thinking and examples of how the course might affect them and their colleagues, the teachers were invited to take part in an activity designed to encourage them to 'think systemically' and in which they would attempt to 'see themselves through their colleagues' eyes'. Having been given examples, they were asked to describe and then to draw a 'map' of their work setting, showing the key people involved and the relationships between them (Draper, Gower and Huffington, 1991). The main purpose of this was to provide a graphic representation of the size and

shape of the work context as perceived by the teacher and to raise their awareness of their place within it. Following this, they were asked to think about the responses of their colleagues to them doing the course, for example, who had been affected positively and who negatively; they were then asked to complete sentences, as though expressed by their colleagues, about them doing the course (See example of activity sheet in Appendix IV).

As far as I can tell, the speech and language difficulties course at Birmingham seems to be ...

Since (name) started the course s/he's...

As far as I'm concerned the BEST things about her/him doing the course are...

As far as I'm concerned the WORST things about her/him doing the course are...

By this stage in the research, the implications of the course for speech and language therapists had emerged as an important research question. However, neither in the interviews or the systemic thinking activities were the teachers directly asked about their relationships with therapists. The information was elicited by asking generally about colleagues' and others' involvement during the course. Responses therefore provide a metaperspective on colleagues' reactions and, in effect, reflect teachers' self-perceptions.

This activity was repeated, by post, in the Autumn of 1993 to the group of 25 teachers who had completed the course in April 1993 (the second cohort). This time the teachers were asked only to describe their work setting without the mapping activity as it was difficult to convey the instructions for this at a distance.

Analysis of data

In this study, as in many others, the analysis was conducted by the researcher, who had conducted the questionnaires, interviews and arranged the systemic thinking activities. The process of data analysis is creative, described by Charles Hull (1985) as 'an exact art' likened to literary criticism, rather than a scientific activity in the traditional sense.

Data are always open to multiple interpretations (Grace, 1994) but the analysis of qualitative data is also an attempt to impose pattern and order on to the content of discourse which is 'individual and idiosyncratic' (Powney and Watts, 1987). In this study, analysis sought to find similarities and themes both within individual transcripts and across groups. A strong effort was made to acknowledge and value individuality. Some coding and analysis of data began at the earliest stages so that further planning and action was still possible during the research process. The search for meaning has been described as a 'process of ever widening horizons' (Grace, 1990); new questions are thrown up which lead on to more problems to address. In this study, decisions about a further evaluation activity had to be made as one activity continued or was just completed to ensure availability of participants. Flexibility was necessary in the research process.

The literature refers frequently to 'immersion' in interview data, 'living with it' for some time, in order to become familiar with it and to begin to see the patterns and themes which emerge (Riley, 1990). Experience of reading and re-reading the transcripts can lead to a point of almost knowing them by heart. Phrases would come into mind and in meetings discussion was often illustrated by relevant quotation from a teacher's interview or questionnaire response.

Data are reduced to some extent by processes of selection, simplification, abstraction and transformation (Miles and Huberman, 1984). In the analysis of the data similarities were apparent in clusters of words and phrases. Some of these endorsed pre-conceived ideas which existed in the course arrangements, for example, tutorial and other 'support'; development of 'knowledge' and 'practice'. However, many of themes emerged and assumed importance through their recurrence. Notes and highlighter pens were extensively used to identify elements which occurred frequently or were emphasised in individual transcripts. Following this the exercise was greatly assisted by the word processor, with the 'cut and paste' facility taking on a potent meaning. Examples were

copied from individual transcripts and pasted under headings. These were then cut and pasted again as illustrative examples in the report.

Confidentiality and anonymity.

In insider research the role of researcher is not always separate from other relationships with participants and anonymity is not possible. There is however, a need to ensure that information is not linked with particular individuals. No actual names of participants are given in this study. In some parts of the study, they are given numbers. Although this is rather impersonal, it serves to show that the excerpts came from the full range of interviews. Pseudonyms are used in the three case studies.

Summary

This chapter has explored the rationale for, and described the selection of research tools to examine the complexities of a case study of professional development by distance education. It is suggested that illuminative approaches offer the best opportunities to evaluate its multi-faceted characteristics. These approaches are used within an action research framework in order to deal with the systemic nature of the enterprise in which elements interact. The flexibility of this approach also allows questions to be addressed which arise in the process of the research. Further, as the engagement of people with a particular programme is at the heart of the study, research tools are necessary which can explore opinions and reactions of key participants. Questionnaires, interviews and systemic thinking activities are the main tools of investigation and the telephone plays an important role in ensuring maximum participation and response. The use of a systems view of development and evaluation is linked with the methodological assumptions of the study and in the next chapters, an interactive approach will address the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter.

In order to illustrate the main themes, certain aspects have been selected as significant in the functioning of the enterprise and its impact:

The critical starting point was an investigation of the needs of practitioners in the field of speech and language difficulties. The perceived needs were influential in developing the content of the course, which was set within a university system and developed as distance education. The main results of this questionnaire survey, together with essential information about the course, are briefly presented as the Introduction to Part 2.

In order to begin to address the question about the main processes in the development of the course, an evaluation of the tutoring system is presented in Chapter 5. This is an important element in the course which mediates between the students and the University. It provided a social context for students learning at a distance from the course provider.

In Chapters 6 and 7 other processes are examined by presenting evaluation of content of the course. These are selected because of extremes of response, both positive and negative, elicited from the students and for their perceived importance to work in speech and language difficulties. Chapter 6 particularly examines the content areas in relation to teachers' learning patterns and their view of the relevance and levels of difficulty of the materials. In Chapter 7, the perceived relevance of parts of the course to teachers' practice is explored.

At the level of professional development, a course must link with a practitioner's work setting. Aspects of the interface between the course and the work context of the students are examined in Chapter 8 and, because speech and language difficulties provide the context for this course, particular prominence is given to the teachers' link with speech and language therapists in their work. This theme is particularly strong in Chapter 8 but occurs throughout Chapters 5 to 9.

Throughout the data gathering activities, the integration of the course with teachers' working lives emerged as a strong theme. Interviews, specifically designed to explore

this further, were undertaken with three teachers and the results of these are presented in Chapter 9.

INTRODUCTION TO PART 2

The development project

In April 1989, the Department for Education and Science began to fund a twenty-one month project at the University of Birmingham, based on a joint research proposal from the University of Birmingham and Birmingham Polytechnic. The research for this study began with my appointment in the School of Education. Although working with a steering group, I was the sole researcher and course developer until 1992.

The aims of the funded project were :

1. To investigate the needs of teachers working with children with speech and language disorders
2. To develop a diploma-level course by distance learning for teachers, based on the identified needs

Investigating need

Questionnaire to the University of Reading diplomates

A brief questionnaire was sent to the thirty seven teachers who had completed the course in Remedial Language Studies at Reading University, described in Chapter 3. This asked respondents to remember their course in terms of what had been most and least useful to their work since. They were asked what else they would have liked in their course and to add any comments which might help in planning a new course. 24 out of 37 questionnaires were returned (64.9%) and, although the questions were brief, the responses were often lengthy, discursive and informative. Some of the respondents were completing the questionnaire ten years after their course. Those who had most recently been students were remembering a course finished three years earlier. It has been suggested that

'What is remembered by a respondent can sometimes be more pertinent to the evaluator than what 'actually happened'. (Henderson, 1978 p83)

Patterns and themes which emerged suggested that the course had offered excellent information on aspects of language development and disability and that the teachers would have liked more information on the applications of this to teaching. As the course was full-time the teachers had not been in contact with their schools on a day-to-day basis for a year. Opportunities for practical classroom experience during the course were likely to have been scarce.

The main survey

The responses of the ex-Reading teachers contributed to the generation of questions for a larger postal questionnaire to survey the perceived needs and priorities of teachers working with pupils identified as having speech or language difficulties. 274 questionnaires were sent out and, following reminders, a total return of 161 (58.8%) completed questionnaires resulted. The majority of respondents described their work setting as a class or unit for these pupils.

The figures from the survey were consistent with literature suggesting that many teachers work across age ranges, particularly nursery and infant ages or with infant and junior age children and that there is little provision for pupils in secondary and post-16 settings.

The majority of the respondents were women teachers, in their late thirties to mid-forties, working mainly with primary school pupils. The information obtained endorsed observations that teachers working in the field of language disability had few opportunities to prepare specifically for the task. 12 (7.5%) of the total number of respondents had a qualification which could be defined specifically as one related to language and/or language disability. Many of them seemed isolated in their work.

Special provision had therefore been made for pupils without adequately considering their needs for teachers with specialist knowledge and skills.

In publications elsewhere detailed findings of the study are discussed (Miller 1991a and b).

Themes and processes

Overall the responses to the survey suggested the need for teachers to gain knowledge related to the specialist field of studies but well embedded in the practical aspects of their day-to-day work with children in school, a view which concurred with the responses of the Reading teachers to their course.

Teachers and speech-language therapists

A recurring theme throughout the questionnaire responses was the teachers' desire to understand their speech therapy colleagues. The wish to know about language assessment, linguistic sciences and theory of speech and language disorders was often explicitly linked with better understanding of speech therapists. Therapists were also top of the list of other professionals the teachers wanted to work with. To a lesser extent, educational psychologists were named. It was possible that gaining a particular area of knowledge, of language and its difficulties, would give the teachers better understanding of the day-to-day working philosophies of the therapists. Familiarity with some of the literature and research on language could assist the teachers in more satisfactory interactions with the therapists. They would be able to ask more pertinent questions. Questioning and discussion might affect the therapists.

The isolation of teachers

Half of the respondents to the questionnaires described themselves as working 'single-handed'. Teaching pupils with language difficulties was an isolating and potentially lonely activity. It was possible that further specialisation through the proposed course

might serve to enhance this by making the students different from their colleagues. There was therefore a responsibility in designing the course to enable the teachers to interact with others, to obtain support from them and to be in a position to offer help to others as a result of the course experience. The teachers would become more able to assist colleagues in identifying children who might need help and in reducing inappropriate labelling of children.

Reflective practitioners

The investigation of needs gave evidence that teachers were already reflecting on their situation and attempting to suggest solutions to it by proposing topics for professional development. A central purpose of the course would be to encourage and develop this process further. The course would need to have strategies built in to it to help the students to examine themselves in relation to their work and to reflect on the effect of their actions. A course on language difficulties would inevitably focus on communication and should encourage the students to examine their interactions with pupils and with their colleagues.

Throughout, it was intended that the participants would play a part in further course development and that this would contribute to their learning from the course. The process of evaluation would also represent a commitment to the students that the course developers were also reflective practitioners.

Research

The teachers' views of 'research' were ambivalent in the investigation but this was probably due to a fault of the questionnaire design. A reframing of the term, 'research' may have elicited more positive responses. Whilst some teachers appeared to be already persuaded that research was a possibility for them, others were not convinced. However, at the level of a long, award-bearing course, it should be possible to assist teachers in becoming more critical and in evaluating their practice. In particular, it should be

possible, through activities and assignments to encourage the process of planning, action, observation and reflection, which are central to the 'action research' approach (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). Practice-based research is needed in the field of child language disability. A course developing initiatives in teacher education should ensure that a contribution was made to the field of study.

Course structure

The course was structured as modules in order to conform to the established pattern of professional development courses for teachers in the University of Birmingham (See Appendix V)

A description of the modules can be found in Appendix VI. The headings for the modules were:

MODULE 1: The nature and development of communication

MODULE 2 : Developmental difficulties of communication and special educational needs

MODULE 3 : Appraisal of the child with a language difficulty in the educational context

MODULE 4: The child with a language difficulty and the curriculum

MODULE 5: Educational management and the child with a language difficulty

MODULE 6: Special studies in special education (Project module)

Much of the course was based on interactive text comprising booklets, with readings and activities and recordings to be sent to students for home study. Students were to be supported by regional tutors. They would also meet for a residential component each year. This would afford opportunities for students to meet together as a whole group. One of the conditions for acceptance on to the course was that applicants should be practising teachers and should have contact with children described as having a language difficulty. They could therefore be asked to engage in activities and assignments related to their work context. In addition to the study texts, a handbook provided students with general information before beginning the coursework. This

included guidance on the writing and assessment of assignments and there was a substantial section on study skills. An information pack for tutors was also written giving them guidance on the running of tutorials and how students could be supported.

Modules were considered equivalent to one hundred hours of study, including all activities, reading and assessed work associated with them. However, the only compulsory element was an assignment, although it would be difficult to complete the assignment without studying at least some of the module. There was a choice of assignment for each module with opportunities to negotiate variations on these if required. All assignments had some focus on an aspect of practice.

The title of the course

At an early stage in the project, discussions in the School of Education suggested that a suitable title for the course would be one reflecting the needs of children with a wide range of speech and language characteristics. A title suggesting 'disorder' would be interpreted as addressing a narrow spectrum of needs because of the popular, confused, use of this term (see Chapter 2). The term 'specific' was not thought to be useful. If the word 'difficulties' appeared in the course title the needs of a larger group of pupils could be addressed. There was more likelihood that the course would attract teachers from a variety of settings working with children whose access to education was thought to be hindered by communication problems. Whilst initially, under the influence of the DES, the course set out to serve those teachers working with children whose language difficulty was considered to be primary, this would have resulted in a particularly narrow focus. The proposed content and form of the course was not irrelevant to practitioners whose work was with children for whom language difficulty was related to other problems or was part of a wider constellation of difficulties. For many pupils identified with special educational needs, communication affects their access to education. It is relevant for teachers in a wide range of settings to be better informed

about language. Distance education, because of its close links with day-to-day work, can offer teachers the opportunity to reflect on their practice, in situ.

The term 'speech and language difficulties' was therefore selected for the course and is intended to signify the spectrum of characteristics which may occur. The terms are less important than the emphasis throughout the course on practitioners' identification of the features of their own and children's language. Students on the course are expected to reflect on the way they use language themselves, the way in which their language and thinking are linked and the way in which their language interacts with that of their pupils. Where any of these give rise to concern, an understanding of differences between the language of pupils and the language of teaching and the curriculum offered to them is essential if the needs of all pupils are to be met.

The start of the course

The first cohort of the speech and language difficulties course began at a time when little support for teachers' professional development for special educational needs was available. Funding was allocated to specific 'national priorities' which included teachers of pupils with special needs in ordinary schools (SENIOS) and teachers of pupils with visual impairment, hearing impairment or severe learning difficulties. Other areas were designated as 'local priorities' for which local authorities had to assume a greater share of the costs. Notwithstanding, in 1990, 30 students registered for the course.

The teachers came from a variety of backgrounds, in spite of the original intention of the DES that they should be drawn only from settings with pupils with 'true language disorders'. Teachers whose pupils were described as having a variety of special educational needs were hoping to gain something from the course. Details of the first cohort can be found in Appendix VII. In summary, they could be described as largely a group of women teachers in mid-career, working in a variety of settings where pupils

would be expected to have a wide range of language difficulties. Few of them had previously undertaken professional development of a similar nature.

Until that point, the project was an attempt to develop a course systematically by seeking views of interested people and feeding the views in to the course plans. With the intake of students, the course became a living system in which students and tutors began to interact with each other, with the University and the course. Predictions of an appropriate course could now be tested against the reality of students' and tutors' experience and their reactions to the course. It became increasingly apparent that

'the students' learning experience is much more than just their interaction with the course components' (Calder, 1994 p99).

Richey's model of a course suggests that essential elements are the learner, the content, the environment and the delivery of instruction (Richey, 1992). Although her model specifically addressed workplace employee 'training' programmes, it is also applicable to professional development. Further, the particular combination and interaction of these elements is different in the case of every student.

The following chapters will explore how *systemic* processes become apparent in the life of the course. The data presented aims to address the questions posed in the Introduction to this study and in Chapter 4, about the main processes in the development of the course, the implications of the course for teachers and speech and language therapists and how the processes can be understood for future developments.

CHAPTER 5: EVALUATING TUTORIALS AND SUPPORT

Introduction

Arrangements for the support of students during their study are an important aspect of any course. In distance education, the literature identifies tutors as guides and mentors in the students' learning journey. Because of the reliance on written and recorded materials, the media of distance education courses may lack some flexibility, although this may be compensated by the consistency of material which each learner receives. In discussing the pedagogical issues in distance education, Haughey (1991) notes the need to accept that the 'perfect package' for all learners has not been achieved. In any educative process each learner is unique and will respond in different ways to the content and form of the course. A means for individualising the 'imperfect package' must therefore be built in to a distance education system. Interactive aspects of teaching and learning and a 'live' element, in which individual needs can be addressed, are considered to greatly enhance efficacy. Tutors are employed in many courses to support the students in their learning and assist their personal interpretation of course materials. An additional issue has importance in this particular study where the course is explicitly designed to develop the competence of practitioners. Although distance education may be a particularly suitable form of study for professional development, students may feel isolated. The opportunity to study alone may be attractive to some students but the nature of teachers' work suggests that working with complete autonomy could be a disadvantage and undesirable. The encouragement of interaction between course members through the provision of opportunities in tutorials will be important.

The attempts to develop social learning in the course and to develop activities related to work practice endorse the view that

'Neither learning or teaching are possible outside of a network of personal relationships'.

and there is

'a constant reciprocal interaction between the technical and the social subsystems and between them and the environment' (Taylor 1994 p131)

In this course with its focus on language and communication, opportunities were provided to learn in a social context and to receive support and guidance. Balance between autonomy and dependence is expected. Most of the students' education prior to the course had been campus-based and it was thought that they might need help in making maximum use of distance education. The specialism in which the teachers worked meant that many of them rarely met with others with similar interests. Further, it has been observed that since school settings do not necessarily provide a context for teachers to discuss their work

'in-service courses provide a legitimate setting to meet such needs. ... It validates talk which in the school context might be seen as excessively zealous and permits insight into the way that other schools and classrooms operate' (Collins, 1991 p70)

It may also be that the reality of school life does not create many opportunities to sit down for an extended discussion about anything. One of the students said

... pressure at work ... sometimes to sit down and have theoretical discussion is quite hard to arrange around, you know, the practicalities of who's going in what taxi....

The tutorials could provide the contact and a context for discussion.

The evaluations presented in this chapter explore the assumption that distance education will be enhanced by providing an interactional element which has relevance for the students' practice. The students will thus engage socially and emotionally with the content and the course. The chapter focuses on tutorials which were the 'official' support system organised for students by the University. They form an important subsystem through which the content and form of the course can be mediated for the students.

Tutorials

The tutorial system was examined as follows:

In the end-of-course questionnaires completed by students in 1992 general feedback on tutorials was requested (see Appendix II) The teachers were asked to rate the usefulness of the tutorials and to say how they had, or had not, helped. Comments on tutorials were then picked up and supplemented by the telephone interviews.

At the beginning of the third year of operation of the Course (1992), a feedback questionnaire on tutorials was sent to the second year cohort of students. This asked specifically about the organisation of tutorials and the activities which took place and were considered most useful (see Appendix III).

Informal discussions and four longer interviews provided comments from the tutors' perspectives.

The tutorials in the course are 'recommended', but it has been unusual for any student to opt not to attend. In the second cohort, one student chose not to go to tutorials, because it would mean a round trip taking more than six hours from a remote part of Scotland. This student had telephone contact with the tutor.

Each student is allocated to a group as near to his or her home as possible. In the first two years of the course, cohorts of around 30 students meant that they were thinly, and not evenly, spread around the country so that some had considerable long or difficult journeys to attend tutorials. The venue is arranged to be mutually convenient to the majority, with arrangements negotiated by the group. In many cases the venue rotates. Students' and tutors' homes are used; occasionally groups meet in the work base of a student; local colleges and universities are used if the tutor or one of the students has a connection there; the University of Birmingham is the venue for groups in the Midlands. The size of groups varies, averaging 5 students, with the largest groups having 7 students. In 1993 it was necessary to allocate a single student to a tutor because of geographical location.

The tutors

The call for tutors for the first cohort of the course resulted in a surprisingly large number of applicants. As around thirty students were expected, initially no more than six tutors would be required. More than fifty applications were received from professionals with highly relevant experience in teaching and speech-language therapy. Some were dually-qualified. Twenty were shortlisted for interview. Following interviews and a training day, nineteen tutors were appointed on the basis of their experience with child language disability and an interest or experience in adult learning, either in higher education or professional development contexts. It was decided to appoint all of these people and to hold them in a 'pool' of tutors who would receive training as the course developed. They could then be called on as new groups of students enrolled. The advantage of this was that all tutors, whether or not they had a group of students in the first year, could receive course materials and information and take part in training opportunities. They would be ready when needed for new cohorts.

During the first year, seven tutors were used. As far as possible, an attempt was made to use an equal number of practitioners from therapy and teaching. Tutors expressed some concern that they would not have enough experience and knowledge of the others' work and so in an effort to redress this and to provide support for the tutors in their task, a tutor whose background was teaching was paired with one from therapy. The aim was to give opportunities for the tutors to contact another person for discussion in addition to University staff. Also, any tutor without an assigned group in the first year was linked with an existing group as a means of familiarising them with the course.

The planned role of the tutors was based on the UK Open University's concept of an Educational Counsellor who provides 'the advice, help and support given to students to enable them to make satisfactory progress in the system' (Robinson, 1981). Early in the course development, four tutors from an OU course in special education were

interviewed in order to gain a perspective on the tutoring role. They gave an impression of a group of people who saw tutoring as an optimistic activity, beneficial to themselves and the students. They were interested in the process of education as well as course content. The support and experience of the institution was important to them and they appreciated the help and feedback which they were given in their task. Some OU courses separate the roles of tutors and counsellors. This was not relevant in a professional development course in which personal and professional learning issues were likely to merge.

In discussions with tutors for the first cohort, it was clear that they too gained personally and professionally from the work

J *I've gained up-to-date references and materials. ... the Authority (her employer) has gained from my tutoring*

R *I've learned so much - a different point of view - different ways of working. Things I thought I knew presented in a different way.*

The tutors are conscientious in their work, expressing concern for the students and some anxiety that they are fulfilling their role adequately.

R *Tutorials are always a worry. I wonder whether the journey was worthwhile (for the students).*

J *I have had to realise that the students don't just see me as one of them, but as a tutor. I feel evaluated by the group and I feel I can't live up to their expectations.*

Perhaps the experience of distance education is lonely for tutors, as it is for students. Tutors may need additional encouragement to use the support available to them from other tutors and from the University.

The tutors' role in the Birmingham course included marking students' written assignments. Each assignment was to be marked by the pair of tutors, who would agree a

grade for the work based on a set of grade criteria used for all modular courses within the School of Education. The student's identified tutor provided written feedback and comments. Assignments would also be moderated by University staff, who provide support and feedback to the tutors. A sample of assignments is also sent to an external examiner. The aim is to provide a fair evaluation of students' work, to give formative feedback and to act as a supportive arrangement for the tutors in their role as assessors. However, interviews with tutors suggest that they experience some ambivalence in this role and they rate it as one of the worst things about tutoring.

Putting grades on is difficult. Co-marking with another person does help - I don't have total responsibility for the grade given. But I'd like to be able to say that the grade was given by the University tutor. Grading changes the relationship with the student.

Marking, judging.

Perhaps negative comments about marking would come from teachers anywhere. Such views are certainly heard frequently in higher education. Marking is always time-consuming and in distance education, particularly so, because of the detailed written feedback required. In other forms of education, there may be less feeling of a responsibility to provide this, as tutors know that they will see the student and will be able to discuss the work. However, these tutors also see the students, although perhaps they do not think that time at the tutorials should be used for this. Many of the students ask for more time to discuss assignments. The marking system in this course is more time-consuming than in others because of the system of pairing. Each tutor has to prepare notes for discussion with their partner, discuss each assignment and then prepare the final feedback for the student. Perhaps though, what the tutors are experiencing is a tension in their dual roles of 'supporter' and 'assessor'. They may experience some difficulties in forming a helpful relationship with the students whilst at the same time being responsible for grading their work.

Students' views

The information requested from students at the beginning of their second year in 1992 included the length of time students travelled to their tutorial meetings. 22 responses to the questionnaire were received (from a possible total of 27).

8 travelled less than an hour

7 travelled between one and two hours

6 travelled between two and three hours

1 travelled more than three hours

The meetings are arranged six times a year and last three hours. Motivation to attend appears to be high. All 22 respondents said they tried to attend every meeting. However, not all students were equally convinced of the value of tutorials. In answer to the question, 'How useful are the tutorials, responses were as follows:

Essential 9

Very useful 6

Quite useful 7

Not very useful 1

Useless 0

The same question was asked in the final questionnaire of students who had completed the course. Those who completed this section (26) gave the following responses:

Essential 7

Very useful 5

Quite useful 6

Not very useful 6

Useless 2

One respondent added:

Wouldn't be without them and wouldn't mind more

The main purpose of the tutorial meetings is to support students in their learning as they progress through the course. It is suggested to tutors that they should focus on clarification and discussion of course materials, development of activities and joint projects and any other matters related to the course for which students might need support. Tutors are given broad guidelines for each tutorial but it is expected that each group will develop its own operational style and that the expressed needs of students will guide meetings. As the core content of the course is provided in the materials, it is not expected that tutors should teach new content. In courses in the UK Open University, Murgatroyd (1980) observed that pressure for 'chalk and talk', by both tutors and students, was high. He considered this was not surprising as it probably reflected the type of education they had come from. One of the tutors in the present study endorsed this

In the tutorials the students very much want teaching from the tutor. They want to feel they get something from the tutorials so we did have some direct input each tutorial.

Care is therefore needed to ensure that students across the course have a consistent experience of course content and that tutors understand the rationale for this.

When asked what students saw as the function of the tutorials, responses were categorised under four main headings relating to :

Meeting with other teachers sharing experiences and ideas with them: 16 respondents.

Discussion and clarification of course texts: 10 respondents.

Discussion of assignments: 8 respondents

Support from tutor: 6 respondents

Additionally 3 respondents mentioned the function of the tutorials as a help in the particular situation of distance learning or learning later in life:

'To support students during a lonely experience'

'To reduce isolation of distance learning'

'To give guidelines and advice to people who are returning to learning after some years' absence'

In the questionnaire at the beginning of year 2, students were asked about the activities in their tutorials. A rank-ordered list shows the frequency of activities marked by the respondents

Discussion of assignments before writing them (21)

Discussion of any, spontaneously arising topics (20)

Exchange of information between students about their practice (20)

Discussion of course texts, including activities (20)

Pre-planned discussion led by tutor (19)

Tutor presents prepared material (18)

Discussion of assignments after handing back (17)

Handing out of photocopied extracts from books or journals (16)

Students present prepared material (14)

Tutor-discussion with individual students (apart from the main group) during tutorial time. (14)

Handing out of photocopied sheets prepared by students (11)

Handing out of photocopied sheets prepared by tutor (10)

Pre-planned discussion led by one of the students (9)

Three respondents mentioned 'other' activities:

discussion of videos and tapes made by students of their pupils and their working practices; discussion of further reading from books or journals;

eating and chatting;

a quiz (presumably course-related).

Respondents were then asked to select the three items which took up the most time in their tutorials. Items mentioned, are in rank order below (number in brackets indicates number of times mentioned).

- 1 Exchange of information between students about their practice (12)
- 1 Discussion of assignments before writing them (12)
- 2 Discussion of course texts, including activities (10)
- 3 Pre-planned discussion led by tutor (9)
- 4 Tutor presents prepared material (8)
- 5 Discussion of any, spontaneously arising topics (6)
- 6 Students present prepared material (5)
- 7 Discussion of assignments after handing back (3)
- 8 Pre-planned discussion led by one of the students (2)

Following this, respondents were asked to select the three from the original list which they personally found most useful.

- 1 Exchange of information between students about their practice (16)
- 2 Discussion of assignments before writing them (15)
- 3 Discussion of any, spontaneously arising topics (7)
- 4 Handing out of photocopied extracts from books or journals (5)
- 4 Discussion of assignments after handing back (5)
- 4 Discussion of course texts, including activities (5)
- 5 Tutor presents prepared material (4)
- 6 Pre-planned discussion led by tutor (3)
- 7 Students present prepared material (2)
- 7 Tutor-discussion with individual students (apart from the main group) during tutorial time. (2)

5 respondents found that all three of the activities which took up most time in their group concurred with those which they personally found most valuable

9 respondents found two of the activities concurred with those they personally found most valuable

6 found one of the activities concurred with those they personally found most valuable

Two respondents gave three different activities from those which were allotted most time in their tutorials.

Few respondents listed additional activities they would like included in the tutorials although three would have liked more individual time with opportunities to discuss assignments in more detail.

Opportunities to meet other teachers was highly favoured but there were also indications that the dynamics of group interaction were important in the perceived usefulness of the meetings. In the questionnaires, the eight respondents who evaluated their tutorials as 'not very useful' or 'useless' included comments such as:

Improvements were made in the second year. The members of the group became more open and willing to share their experience and expertise.

Some students had rather negative attitudes and tended to monopolise the discussions with their gripes

The balance of the group dynamics was wrong

When this was pursued further in the telephone interviews, three members of the same group, who had not felt positively about the value of tutorials, separately said:

Member 1 *I just felt that one person particularly dominated ...*

CM *... Was it really difficult to sort that person out and to make them...*

Member 1 *Yes, I think in fact she quietened down towards the end, but by then I think we'd all been deflated ...*

Member 2 *... I think it was the make-up of the group. I don't think that some of our group really wanted to be on the course. ...and really they did get to be very depressing at times.*

...I think we tended to get hooked on to one thing, and if you got a very strong personality in the group it's very difficult to break off without being rude...I know we tried at various times to break away. But

towards the end, we got a lot more courage amongst ourselves and we did break up into little groups and discuss things and that was much better.

Member 3 ... and there were one or two people in the tutorial meetings who were quite vociferous and often got us off on the wrong track so...

Others, whilst not condemning the value of the tutorials said:

Yes, I think, we did have one or two problems with that (the mix of people), without going into personal things

...I think it can be tricky, ... we did have a couple of quite dominant personalities, who - I think those of us who were quieter found it difficult sometimes to put our points of view ...

However, a number of comments suggest additional factors may contribute to successful functioning of some tutorial groups. There can be no pre-planning of the mix of people in a group but certain management strategies may be helpful. Some respondents linked the style and content of the interactions with the organisation of the group:

CM *Do you think you could have different guidance on how to be in a tutorial group?*

M *I think - actually, yes. I hadn't even thought of that. yes. If we'd had some ideas. ...I got the impression from other tutorials that - little targets were set, little assignments were set to work on. Is that right because I don't feel we ever did that?*

Another, who judged the tutorials 'not very useful' wrote in the questionnaire:

Until the last part of the course the tutorials were not planned so a lot of opportunities for learning and sharing knowledge were wasted

and another:

there was very little structure to the tutorials and some seemed a waste of time

In these cases, either tutors or students had not realised that an amount of planning and structure to the meeting would be required. The tutor seemed not to have succeeded in setting or keeping to an agenda. In other cases, perhaps because the function of the

tutorials was not sufficiently explicit, students were not aware of how they might use them and how they might be able to influence their organisation:

*it took us that long to become aware of what the function of the tutorials was
... became more useful once we'd decided what we wanted from the sessions*

Tutorials were perceived as successful when the tutor and the students were actively involved in the tutorial programme.

I am lucky to be part of a positive group - although we have our problems from time-to-time our tutor does not allow a session to become a moaning time. The tutorials have played a major part in increasing my confidence when I am talking about the children I teach and their difficulties. The group is supportive and humorous so there is no reason to feel self conscious. The only thing I would change would be the inclusion of individual time. This was discussed in our group but has proved difficult to set up due to constraints of travelling distances. In the end we felt we did not want to lose whole group sessions ...especially as our tutor is available by telephone.

There is a feeling here of a sense of ownership of the group by the students and that decisions have been democratically made in a supportive setting.

For the second cohort of the course, a pattern of agenda-setting for tutorials became better established. All respondents except two stated that an agenda was set (it is not clear why two members said that it was not).

The agenda setting took place:

At the previous tutorial 1

At the beginning of the tutorial 5

Between tutorials 14

In addition, two respondents said that the agenda might be set at any of these times.

Agendas were set by:

The tutor 12

The students 0

Discussion between tutor and students 10

Where the agenda results from a discussion between students and tutor, in the majority of cases, there is contact between the tutorial sessions.

Asked if they had ever seen the tutor for individual discussion outside of the tutorial time 5 said that they had; 17 reported that they had not. However, asked if they ever telephoned the tutor between tutorials, 19 respondents had done so; 3 had not.

In guidelines developed since the beginning of the course, it is suggested that tutors give students a time when they will be available on the telephone. Boundaries need to be set and there will always be variations depending partly on the relationship developed between individuals and the way the ground rules of operation are interpreted. This becomes clear in some of the interviews:

CM *Do you think the course could run without tutorials?*

P *No, not at all. In fact towards the end it almost would have been nice to have had a few more.*

CM *What, for doing the project?*

P *Yes, yes. But, I didn't find it a problem because (tutor) was ...totally available on the phone and so on, ... I could imagine though, that if you didn't have somebody as good as (tutor), it might well have not worked out so well.*

M *...I always felt that I could ring her up and sound her out about various things. It was like an open door really and if I didn't take advantage of it that was my fault.*

However, some students did not find this so easy and individual feelings and characteristics will always affect their use of opportunities

I know (tutor) was always accessible by phone and was always ready to listen, but it was still, it was getting - lifting the phone rather ...

It's just 5 or 10 minutes to have a chat - perhaps I should have taken courage myself and rung the tutor up and maybe, but you know, you feel that you don't like to bother and ...

Tutorials were more often evaluated as 'essential' or 'very useful' when the tutor was rated highly as a provider of resources or additional information and where the group members appeared to relate well together and contributed to the group.

good discussion, feedback, sharing ideas from colleagues and tutor

Opportunities for mutual support and discussion of problems and successes. In the case of our tutor group - gave us the benefit of the knowledge of a really excellent practitioner working in the field

In particular the tutors were said to have:

provided back-up resources and suggested avenues of research

Helped clarify texts and expand materials

Particularly useful in preparing for an assignment

The students appear to see the tutorials as opportunities to discuss practice and at the same time to gain help in tackling work specific to the course

I had a fantastic tutor ... whenever we went to a tutorial she'd always sort of prepared things for us. She'd always got a photocopy of anything that she'd found in books, or got books out that we could borrow, and a couple of times she had videos that she'd borrowed or taped something from the television. ...we always had a good sort of couple hours of relevant discussion to do with what we were doing at that time, and I think I had a nice group anyway. We had lunch and had a good chat, you know, talked over what we were all doing at work as well as ...on the course.

M ... I attended as many tutorials as I could with (tutor), ... we were just amazed at the materials and things that she had found for us either as a group or as individuals.

This tutor provides the practitioner side of the university course, drawing from their own experience and perhaps bringing a reality to the course materials by linking them with practice. With reference to inservice courses for teachers, Collins (1991) suggests:

'primary responsibility rests with the tutor. It is s/he who is offering a service to the practitioner; if that service is not shown as contributing in a non-threatening way to the teacher as a professional, s/he must not be surprised if the teacher continues to harbour the stereotype of the academic: divorced from the real world, in love with words and dreams' (p74)

There is no suggestion that these tutors were stereotyped academics. Indeed, if Collins' view is to be taken seriously, perhaps because they were not full-time employees of the University, their credibility was enhanced. However, whilst a resourceful tutor was appreciated, other styles of support were also valued:

P *(some of the groups) were far more sociable, but I think we were more business like and we were very much made independent, which at first I was a bit nervous about, but I increasingly appreciated that - that I was actually empowered to do it myself*

CM *How did that happen, what was done?*

P *(tutor) actually would just give you - I mean she was there for support and she was there to answer questions but she didn't spoon feed us and she very much helped me get it out of myself'. ... I was a bit uneasy about it to start with, but if I'd had a different sort of tutor who'd really waited on you hand and foot and finger and let me fuss I think I would have gone on fussing. 'Cos I was very unsure what I was doing at the beginning ...*

H *... the tutorials ... were interesting really, where one of us had been on a course, or one of us had found something, and we brought it to the tutor group. So we in fact were doing the teaching. So what we were asking for, we were doing ourselves. Maybe that's what adult education is all about*

There can be no doubt however, that contact with other teachers was an important element, rated highly by the students. It was the most frequently-cited activity in the tutorial groups

Well I think just the throwing ideas backwards and forwards and if you suggested something, and somebody would say, oh no, I did that, it doesn't work at all.

the new ideas I got from meeting people who worked in a completely different way and ... I went and visited other people's units.

... the group - that's where we got the most support. not just from (tutor) but also I was very lucky in the mix of people I was with. ... the experience of some of those people ... (a student) used to come to tutorials laden down with stuff ... things she had tried out on her team, you know. The tutorials were excellent.

However, perhaps the management of the discussion was critical in achieving a balance between topics arising directly from the course and those arising in the workplace:

I have generally found the tutorials of benefit although occasionally there has been too much discussion about the workplace and perhaps less about the modules. Students seem to need to 'sound off' about school etc

If contact with other course participants is so much appreciated by the teachers, it might be expected that other links would be made outside of tutorial meetings. The students were asked whether they saw other students or had telephone contact with them.

5 teachers out of the 22 Year 2 students did see other members of their group;

18 reported that they contacted other students by telephone to discuss course matters.

Perhaps, because of distances, getting together was not so easy, but there is clear motivation to be in contact with others from the course and the telephone provides an important means to do this. One interviewee said that during the course,

we had an awful phone bill ... ring D or she would ring me.

Some of the teachers continued meeting after the course finished, although this also depends on distance and probably continues most where teachers from the same, or neighbouring authorities undertake the course:

D and I keep in touch. We have a lunch club and we meet up ... sort of two or three time a year and we keep in touch. D often rings me and she recommended a book that I've just bought ...and that's been really good. ... and you know, I go on courses down here, I would say to her ... Have you heard about that, ... which is really useful.

Well ... on your course this year, the second year, you have G ... working in one of the schools of which I am an advisory teacher for learning difficulties. So she is a very real contact for me, so I should say that probably G ... that's still the person that I still see and will see in the future.

Teachers and speech-language therapists as tutors

The tutors were qualified as teachers, speech-language therapists, or both. A number had additional qualifications, for example, higher degrees in linguistics or psychology. There are advantages and disadvantages in a tutor coming from a different background from the students. There are plenty of precedents for this in higher education although there may be some tensions in professional development courses. Students may see advantages in a tutor having a different view point from their own or may feel that someone from another profession would not understand their needs or the nature of the course material. The advantages and disadvantages may be perceived or real. Tutors too, may feel uncomfortable about dealing with a group from another profession. One said:

I think I was resented for being a speech therapist - sometimes they said they wanted a teacher's point of view. Perhaps they need to have access to a teacher-tutor.

Some students suggested there was a need for understanding from a member of their own profession

P *I think it was quite useful having a teacher tutor as well ... I think perhaps one of the gripes of the speech and language units is that they don't have the opportunity very often to talk to other teachers. We certainly had that in the group, but we also had a tutor who understood our perspectives particularly well, so I think, you know, that was quite important ...*

Others saw both points of view:

J *I think from our tutor's point of view sometimes it was a bit tricky ... we were all teachers, I... she felt it was difficult, because she was a speech and language therapist and some of the educational issues ... were not new to her but weren't really her domain in many ways. But nevertheless I think that sort of can work both ways, because she was able to bring things from her discipline which*

were certainly new to me and to the others and various books and pieces of research which were extremely useful, so although many felt it was better if we had a teacher as a tutor, I don't always think that would necessary because it's useful to have a balance and so on.

Others turned a situation which initially was not seen to be positive, to their advantage:

C *We were all teachers and she was a speech therapist and it really made you ... 'cos her point of view quite often was totally different from ours and it really made you think more, and also I think in a way it helped us to work with your own speech therapist. You were less dogmatic.*

CM *That's interesting. Dogmatic about what sort of things?*

C *Well, just even your roles. Just realising that she does look at it differently from us.*

CM *Oh I see, it helped you to understand her?*

C *Yes*

CM *That's interesting, 'cos some of the students who did have a therapist said they would have preferred a teacher*

C *Well, not - in the beginning I thought that, but no, I think in the end, it was better.*

CM *You learned more from another professional?*

C *... than having a teacher who might have the same views as us, and ... it wouldn't have made you think so much, I don't think*

From the other side, a tutor said,

I've learned how different schools function ... how teachers and therapists work together. I've gained quite a lot of knowledge

Summary

This chapter has endorsed the suggestion that students' social and emotional engagement with the course plays an important part in their learning. The teachers appreciate contact with others in similar circumstances with whom they can share experiences and the feedback reported here suggests that this can be effectively managed as part of a distance learning system. This should be considered vital, given that the teachers may not have, or may not take, opportunities to discuss ideas in their places of work. Although opportunities for contact and discussion will enhance any professional development activity, the arrangements for meetings with others will need particular attention in distance education. The meaning of course materials can be enhanced and

students can be supported in the more formal aspects of the course, for example, the assessed work.

The students also benefit from the experience of tutors who are themselves practitioners and this enhances the tutors' credibility. There may however be some tension if the tutor comes from a different professional background. Comments made about relationships between teachers and speech and language therapists will occur throughout this research and are an important issue in professional development in this field.

The importance of social and psychological engagement with the course has been highlighted. Best's concerns (1993) reported in Chapter 1, about the lack of opportunity to interact with other teachers, will be unfounded when arrangements are built into the system. In the next chapter, some of the 'technical' aspects of the course are considered by examining particular parts of the curriculum.

CHAPTER 6: EVALUATING CONTENT

Introduction

In Chapter 5, social and emotional aspects of the teachers' learning were considered by examining ways in which the students were formally supported in the course. These aspects interact with the content or technical component of the course, presented in a distance education programme largely as written or recorded materials. The subject matter gives the course its special bias and it is this which has drawn the students to the programme. Their daily work brings them into contact with pupils with particular special educational needs and the teachers wish to gain confidence and competence in working with them. In general terms, this chapter focuses on the need for appropriate and accessible content for professional development activities. The students' responses will suggest whether this has been achieved. However, there may be a tension between the perceptions of appropriate content by students and course providers and it is only when the course becomes a reality that this can be assessed. Further, linked with the content and of particular relevance to this research, is whether distance education materials provide appropriate learning resources for practitioners.

Early and retrospective evaluations of the course suggested a range of strong emotional responses of students to the course. Many made it clear that, whether aspects of the course were seen positively or negatively, they experienced a considerable amount of pressure. However, judgements of parts of the course as successful or otherwise can not be based on linear cause and effect but on different interactions of factors for every student.

The main specialist content of the course focused on aspects of language, language development and language difficulty. It then went on to how these can be given special consideration in the education of children who experience language difficulties. In the main, the students had considerable classroom experience but had had few opportunities

to gain detailed information about language. The linking of detailed knowledge about language with teachers' existing professional knowledge and expertise in curriculum development gives the course its distinctive and specialist nature.

In this chapter responses to areas of the course which examined aspects of language are selected to illustrate some of the themes which emerged from the evaluation. The themes assist in addressing the main research questions about the processes involved in the development of the course and their implications for teachers and speech and language therapists.

The topics, which represent units or texts in the course, selected for this part of the study are:

Introduction to language, Early child development, Development of early communication, Later language development, Adolescent development and Thinking about literacy. These six units formed the first module and aimed to provide background information to subsequent modules.

Language description, The nature of speech and language difficulties, Assessment of speech and language and Language assessment in the classroom are selected as the units most concerned with the special nature of the difficulties likely to be encountered in the classroom by the course participants.

Note: a copy of the questionnaire used to evaluate course materials is in Appendix I

The teachers learning.

First reactions

As with all other aspects of the evaluation, from the beginning wide variations in response were apparent. For the first part of the course, the students had little previous experience on which to base their reactions and the response to the content of the material is likely to be affected by feelings on starting a new course of study and the expectations the students bring with them.

The following comes from comments on a full A4 sheet written by one teacher and clearly illustrates the complexity of reactions experienced:

'...I have not undertaken study of this depth for 20 years. On receiving the text through the mail without any preparation by means of a tutorial, the panic rose in me beyond belief... the excessive amount of time taken, especially with the assignment were because of my inability to approach the task efficiently. I am enjoying the reading, reflecting and the whole process is making me think. ...'

In evaluating individual texts the teachers were asked to quantify the time they had spent on all of the work associated with the text. The wide range of hours taken by one group and the different average number of hours taken by different cohorts for the same materials is striking.

For example, the first text of the first module, 'Introduction to language' took the first cohort an average of 16.7 hours, ranging between 6 and 36 hours, the second cohort averaged 11.4 hours ranging between 5 and 22 and the third averaged 19.3 hours ranging from 7 to 56 hours.

In view of these variations it is important to consider how the students rated the workload. Comments suggested that the respondents were divided between those who were rather overwhelmed by the beginning of the course, and those who were relieved that the work was not too heavy. The same work was,

'...far too much and overwhelming at the start of a course, especially when, after 2 weeks, a new course text arrived'

but for others was,

'a nice gentle reassuring introduction - not too much too soon'

'as an introduction it was interesting and not too daunting'

In the next text, on 'Early child development' the average time taken to complete the work by the first cohort was 16.2 hours (range 7-31); the second 16.6 hours (range 8-

50). The third cohort averaged 26 hours with a range between 2 and 80 hours. This average was raised by two respondents who had spent 80 and 60 hours on the work. The one who had spent 80 hours found the amount 'reasonable'; the one who had spent 60 hours found the work 'excessive'. Of 52 people responding to the questionnaire across three cohorts, 42 found the work for this text 'reasonable' and 10 found it 'excessive'. The comments on this material varied from those who considered it to be 'revision' or 'not necessary' for teachers, to others who found it new or a useful updating.

The main factor contributing to the view that the workload was 'excessive' related to the amount and nature of additional reading given with this text

'The papers in the Reader were interesting but quite heavy to digest'

'I find the papers in the Reader particularly heavy going and onerous. ... I found it impossible to read around the subject as suggested due to the pace of the course'.

A similar comment applied to the next text on 'Development of early communication' which also carried a large amount of additional reading. By the time they were studying this material the general workload was accumulating for some students:

'I order my reading of the texts to the assignment ... thus this Text is something that I am using well - but it means that the next texts ... will be held over until my child study is complete. ... The biggest problem with this is the pressure I feel when another brown envelope drops through the door and two end up in a pile'

This student was making decisions about the priority to be given to the work and perhaps would not have experienced such pressure if all of the module had been received together, rather than as single units, which was the practice in the first run of the course. A general feeling that pressure was building up as the first module progressed came from students and tutors.

'Finding it hard to fit things in now and have a backlog of activities but I am finding it very very interesting - wish I had more time'

'The information was very interesting but the sheer volume to read was daunting. One or two difficult days when you couldn't keep to your work timetable and it felt as if you were very far behind. However, despite the workload, a very interesting text'.

Similar comments did not come through in later modules which may suggest that students were becoming more selective about the material and perhaps had established better control over their coursework. However, one of the features of distance education is the actual materials given to students for study. It is not difficult to imagine that the perception of amount of work could be influenced by the real weight of materials. A pile of books waiting to be read is a concrete reminder of work to be undertaken.

For all of the students, the course was undertaken in addition to their daily work, with only a few given any time for study. The best arrangement was made by a local authority which gave half a day a week for study. Others who had study time were given irregular 'odd' days, for which the teachers usually had to make a special request.

Looking back

A question on time commitment was also asked following course completion by the first cohort.

This questionnaire asked students to estimate how much time they had spent working on the course each week, based on values of less than 5 hours, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20 and more than 20 hours.

26 responses were given by the 27 students returning questionnaires, from the cohort of 30

3 students spent less than 5 hours per week

17 spent 6-10 hours

3 spent 11-15 hours

3 spent 16-20 hours

Asked about any exceptions to this broad average, 19 students indicated an increase in workload prior to an assignment.

Asked how they rated the amount of work required overall for the Course:

No students rated it as 'excessive'

6 rated it as 'quite heavy'

16 rated it as 'reasonable'

None said that it was 'insufficient'

4 considered it 'variable'

Many idiosyncracies were apparent in work patterns but the peak for many students became concentrated around assignments

On average 16-20 hours per week would be spent on reading and associated activities. The time always increased during the 2-3 weeks before an assignment was due to be submitted (Possibly up to 30 hours per week).

This student rated the workload as 'quite heavy'.

A student who worked 5 hours per week, rating the workload as 'reasonable', said,

'This gives a very distorted picture as school holiday enabled concentration bursts when sometimes I worked eight hours per day and have been known to take reading on the plane, beach etc. My learning style was to have reading materials piled up by my chair and read whenever I could sometimes just for ten minutes thus making any check on time impossible'.

A student who did not give the average number of hours spent each week considered the workload 'quite heavy', 'in relation to assignments' but 'otherwise reasonable', said

'There was no consistent pattern - but generally less than five hours a week and then solid weekends or a week prior to an assignment'.

Another said,

'the amount of time spent was variable. It increased dramatically prior to handing in an assignment. During the weeks spent on the final project more than 20 hours per week was taken'.

Another,

The special project and the essay on language assessment (analysis of a tape) took considerable time. Both were such that, at various points, I felt as if they brought me to my knees. I wondered if I had the intellectual ability to complete the tasks. I didn't consider how much time I spent on essays, but was aware that younger students were able to achieve excellent academic results in shorter time. I therefore may have had to spend longer to make up for other deficits.

This student was in the 36-45 age band, the average age of the students. She rated the workload as 'reasonable'

Following completion, the first cohort was asked to rate how difficult they had found the course overall.

No students rated the course as 'very difficult'

1 student rated it as 'difficult'

14 rated it as 'fair'

4 considered it 'easy'

No student rated it 'very easy'

7 considered it 'variable'

Amongst these comments it was striking that for some, more than a year after completing the modules, the memory of the 'language description' material, (see below) was still clear:

The language description texts proved to be the most difficult but I regarded them as a challenge and quite enjoyed doing the activities.

This was endorsed by the following comment which may be at the heart of the perceived level of difficulty in the course

These (the course materials and activities) ranged from being fairly easy to very difficult. This was dependent on my personal experience in the field. I found the teaching based activities easy whereas those which were speech therapy or disorder based were far more difficult. They were however, far more valuable to me personally.

'Newness' of material was inevitably tied to its perceived level of difficulty but this did not necessarily make it less relevant. The identification of some topics as 'speech therapy' is interesting and recurs throughout the evaluation. It is a reminder of the distinct professional interests which have been built around this field of education and which are particularly significant when teachers are given access to knowledge and understanding formerly mainly used by therapists.

A small number of other comments related the 'difficulty' of the course to the time available for undertaking some of the practical tasks.

The visit to a secondary school proved impossible for me to achieve

Unrealistic expectations of how much time we could take out of timetable to do activities.

Really enjoyed studying again after a long break. Some of the activities requiring visits - not able to do as no time available.

As the course has developed and the climate of stringency has increased in schools, it has become more difficult for teachers to take time out of their working day for any course-related activities. Observation visits to other schools have had to be understood as optional luxuries and the hope that students might visit each other on an informal basis at work has rarely been realised.

Processes of learning

At every point, the variety of response of the teachers to the materials was striking. The same material was considered 'excessive' and 'insufficient' in amount, 'very new' or 'mostly not new' by individuals in the same cohort. The range of experience of members of a professional development programme was highlighted throughout the study. In general, whether the students reacted positively or negatively was related to a complex tension between the perceived level of novelty of the material, its perceived level of difficulty and its assumed relevance to practice. Very new topics might be seen to be very difficult and negatively evaluated if they were not immediately seen to be applicable to practice; in contrast, very new topics could be judged 'fairly difficult' but if they were thought relevant to practice they were positively received. The permutations of response were complicated.

Perceptions of novelty

The responses to two topics, the 'Development of literacy' and 'Language description' suggest how contrasting judgements of the material are partly affected by the teachers' familiarity with the theoretical perspective taken.

The final text in the first module was 'Development of literacy'. Children with difficulties in spoken language are also at risk in their development of literacy (reading and writing). There is now good evidence to suggest that some children who have experienced early speech problems, which are apparently resolved, go on later to have difficulties with written language (Stackhouse, 1989). There are links between early phonological development and reading skills (Layton and Deeney, 1996). An essential component of a course on children's speech and language difficulties in an educational context must be the development of literacy and problems of literacy.

The approach to the first version of this text was to look at how people are involved in a 'world of literacy'. A predominantly 'real books' approach was taken. A 'running record'

was presented as an assessment of reading under the heading, 'what counts as evidence?' and there were a number of activities to engage the teachers in the examination of children's reading abilities.

'Development of literacy' came at a time when feedback suggested that some participants were overwhelmed by workload. In spite of this, respondents judged the work 'insufficient'. Additionally, over three cohorts, half the respondents said that most of the material was not new. The main conclusion was that a number of the teachers would have liked 'more'. One described the text as '*flimsy*' and another found

'this text had less depth than the previous five.

For many of the respondents, this text did not go far enough. Many of the comments suggested that the teachers already had a sophisticated awareness of the components of literacy but needed to know more about reading difficulties.

The problem with an uncritical endorsement of 'real books' has been that in practice it has often led to very woolly teaching'.

There was a clear need for the teachers to be able to take a critical view of approaches to reading development. They needed to see how different perspectives on reading might throw light on pupils who experienced difficulty in learning to read. The text had not taken sufficient account of knowledge gained with experience. The clear line taken in favour of the 'real books' approach to reading was particularly inappropriate for children experiencing difficulties in acquiring language. The teachers needed a more analytical approach which might help them to explore how and why their pupils' reading was not developing well. Where positive comments were made, these related to activities with children and their reading:

'Particularly liked the activities and the way they persuaded me to structure my thinking on the development of literacy'.

In spite of the comments received about the heavy workload so far, the quantitative responses of the first three cohorts show that the majority assessed the material as 'fair' or 'easy' and the amount of work to be 'reasonable' or 'insufficient', suggesting that there was little to challenge them.

Table 6.1

Response of the first three cohorts to 'Development of literacy'

Amount of work	Excessive 0	Reasonable 30	Insufficient 5		
Level of difficulty N=34	Very diffc't 0	Difficult 0	Fair 17	Easy 14	Very easy 3
Clarity of presentation N=34	Very clear 11	Clear 16	Adequate 7	Much unclear 0	Totally unclear 0
Level of interest	Very inter. 10	Interesting 18	Fair 6	Not Very Interesting 1	Boring 0
How new	Very new 1	Much new 3	Parts new 13	Most not new 18	None new 0
Relevance	Highly 18	Relevant 11	Fairly 4	Mostly irrelevant 1	Totally irrevelant 1

In developing new material, a text 'Thinking about literacy', took a critical view of approaches to reading and gave plentiful reference to research on reading. Several teachers commented that coverage of 'the debate' on various approaches to teaching of reading had been the most useful part of the text.

Table 6.2

1993/95 cohort evaluations 'Thinking about literacy'

14 questionnaires were returned

Amount of work	Excessive 0	Reasonable 14	Insufficient 0		
Level of difficulty	Very diffc't 0	Difficult 2	Fair 10	Easy 2	Very easy 0
Clarity of presentation	Very clear 0	Clear 10	Adequate 4	Much unclear 0	Totally unclear 0
Level of interest	Very inter. 5	Interesting 5	Fair 4	Not Very Interesting 0	Boring 0
How new	Very new 0	Much new 2	Parts new 10	Most not new 1	None new 0
Relevance	Highly 5	Relevant 5	Fairly 3	Mostly irrelevant 0	Totally irrelevant 0

Generally, the new text was received more favourably and no teacher found it an insufficient amount of work. Fewer considered it too easy; none found it irrelevant or uninteresting; it also contained something new for a greater proportion of the teachers.

One teacher commented that it had given

'new perspectives on age-old arguments and points of view'.

Notwithstanding the pressure of work, others wanted to know still more.

I feel it serves to encourage further reading - I certainly felt motivated to look a bit deeper'

In contrast, lack of familiarity with material was an important factor in the largely negative response to 'Language description' which came in the second module. Most of the material was new to the students.

Linguistic analysis is detailed, requiring familiarity with terms and categories which would largely be new to the teachers. Many younger people who have not studied grammar in school find the work particularly difficult. Speech-language therapists in the UK most commonly use the Linguistic Analysis Remediation and Screening

Procedure (LARSP, Crystal, Fletcher and Garman, 1976), a procedure for grammatical analysis.

In the material, a section on the 'sounds of English' was written clearly and conventionally. However, the approach to linguistic analysis was different from LARSP, taking an innovative and more complex approach which linked semantics and syntax, rather than focusing solely on grammar. The teachers were therefore unable to discuss the material with colleagues as they too, were unfamiliar with the semantic-syntactic or meaning-grammar approach.

The material was perceived as excessively difficult by the teachers and they considered it to have little relevance. Feedback from some students was powerful:

'Please please please find a way of simplifying the material in (set book) before next year or present it in a much more phased way in consumable small chunks. I have found this work so conceptually laden that I couldn't get to grips with it, got very frustrated and gave up. ... At the end of this text I felt demotivated and depressed.'

'The student was given little consideration. I felt like a child with language difficulties'.

Questionnaire responses from the first two cohorts suggested that the students had taken an average of 19.4 and 14 hours for Language Description I, ranging from 9-36 hours and 5-27 hours. From the first 14 questionnaires received, 9 respondents had found the work 'excessive' and 5 'reasonable'. For the first time in any evaluations received, 7 people found the work 'very difficult' and 3 found 'much unclear'.

The time taken to complete the material ranged from 2 hours to 'in excess of 25 hours'. At both ends of this range the teachers considered the amount of work to be 'excessive', as did those who reported taking 15, 8 and 6 hours. One teacher wrote 'a very long time'; another wrote, beside the number 27, 'and it continues'.

'I can't even approximate - a very long hard struggle'

The perception of time as 'pressure' or 'stress' is evident in some of the evaluations and there is a link too, with the nature of the demand made by the materials. The content of the 'literacy' text was insufficiently challenging and there were no comments that it was linked with pressure or stress even though it came at the end of the first, heavy module. On the other hand, 'language description' was inaccessible and a considerable challenge to many of the students. Many did not see it as 'interesting' or 'relevant'.

The sections on sounds of English (phonetics) were, in general well received. Activities were comprehensible and, as is usual in practical phonetics exercises, could be amusing if undertaken either alone or with others. It is possible too that it is easier to relate this information to more obvious difficulties of children's speech. Some of the respondents suggested that this part of the material had been 'highly relevant' and 'very interesting' but that the sections on 'grammar and meaning' had not been so.

At the end of two years there was further evidence that changes were urgently needed to this part of the course. The questionnaire sent to the first cohort following their completion asked 'In general, how difficult did you find the course materials and activities' and invited respondents to give details of any exceptions. 26 people responded to this item

1 had found the materials generally 'difficult'

14 found them generally 'fair'

4 found them generally 'easy'

7 found them generally 'variable'

14 of the 26 respondents mentioned 'Language description' as exceptional commenting:

'Both texts were much too technical for the needs of those doing this course'.

'Language description indigestible'

Each of these respondents had considered the material of the course overall to have been generally 'fair' but more than a year after working on 'language description' the teachers still had a strong memory of it and for more than half, it was not a pleasant memory.

Relevance to practice

There is not a simple cause and effect link between the teachers' familiarity with material and whether they received it positively or negatively. An important theme emerging from the evaluations was the extent to which the students also saw relevance to their day-to-day work. All of the students were practising classroom teachers. The purpose of the course was professional development. There was evidence that new and conceptually demanding material could be well received if the teachers saw how it could be used in the classroom.

For example, the evaluations suggested that teachers appreciated other material on language and its development even though for many of them, this presented new information .

The activities introduced early in the course in the text 'Introduction to Language' were intended to help the students to focus on the detail of language and to increase their awareness of features of conversational language and its variety. The material aimed to introduce linguistic terminology and provide them with a language with which to discuss language. A transcription was included as it was unlikely that teachers had experience of this and they could benefit from paying attention and listening carefully to details in spoken language. Transcription is demanding and time-consuming but the information which can come from it can be invaluable in gaining awareness of a child's strengths and weaknesses in language skills and, indeed, of teachers' own language skills. Transcription of language samples is familiar to speech and language therapists and there could be benefits to the relationships between teachers and therapists if both were

aware of what was required. Although a number of the feedback questionnaires suggested that the transcription activity had greatly added to the heavy workload early in the course, there was also suggestion that the experience was beneficial:

'amazed at how much I got out of the transcription exercise. It really made me listen and work out what was happening ... returned to this repeatedly'.

Following this general introduction to language and its characteristics, the materials focused on children's development with particular emphasis on language and communication. Teachers develop practical knowledge of this through their day-to-day contact with children. Some would also have theoretical perspectives from their formal professional education. The course materials might introduce ideas which confirmed, developed or refuted their theories, or update previous knowledge.

In the text on 'Early Child Development' a teacher reported that the '*idea of stages of development*' had been particularly useful, suggesting that even this concept, usually considered fundamental to human development, was to some extent novel.

The text on 'Development of Early Communication' focused on features of language and the processes of communication from the pre-verbal stages to early grammatical structures. This information is vital to anyone who wishes to know the extent of a child's communication difficulty and how it might have been influenced. Respondents evaluated most of the topics in the text as 'particularly useful' and endorsed its relevance,

'Thoroughly enjoyed the book and its relevant reading and feel I will be using a lot of it in my dealings with language unit children'.

Three respondents expressed the view that it had 'all' been useful, one saying that the

'really felt we were getting to grips with the subject at this point'.

A number of the teachers however found the literature of this area especially challenging and difficult to understand, perhaps not surprising if the information is new to them. Modifications were made later to this part by reducing the amount of required reading and making some of it optional.

'There were too many new ideas put across all at once to be digested in a short time'.

Material on 'Later language development' covered the stages after the pre-school years. At this time a primary school teacher would be most likely to encounter difficulties with language but few would have detailed information about language at this stage of development.

'Very interesting and stimulating. Gave the impetus to make further reading ... This is the one area which teachers have not experienced in their training but is very necessary in the specific field that we find ourselves'.

Perhaps the use of the definite article in '*the one area*' is an exaggeration but this seems to make the point that detail on language development is not normally presented to teachers.

A few respondents considered that the material should already be familiar to experienced teachers and whilst some appeared nevertheless to find this useful, others did not.

Most of this text was, for me, rather like a very thorough revision course - I found it both interesting and useful ... Although I have found all the reading very readable, I feel I still need to read some of it again to be able to thoroughly understand and come to terms with it ...

'Having studied the work of Piaget and Vygotsky on my initial teacher training course I found it most interesting to look again at their work 20 years on and to read of developments in the field since that time'.

In contrast however, a student wrote

'Of all the texts this is the one that I have not gained a great deal from. I think this area would be familiar to most teachers'

The needs of the students differ widely and none of the material will be new to all of them. On the other hand, none of the students will be familiar with all of it. The contrasting responses suggest that one of the course organiser's responsibilities is to help students, via their tutors, to meet their own learning needs by selecting and by reading around the topics in ways appropriate for their own requirements.

Some students found it difficult to look beyond their immediate situation and only wished to study material which they saw as immediately relevant. 'Adolescent Development' was provided in order for the teachers from primary schools to consider future development of their pupils and the linguistic challenges presented by secondary education. The increasing amount of provision for older pupils also raised the likelihood that there would be teachers on the course who worked with this age group.

'couldn't see the relevance of this material to speech and language probably because it is not relevant to my own teaching of primary-aged children'.

'I did not see why so much time was given to a study of this age group'.

One teacher marked the box judging the material 'mostly irrelevant' but beside it added

'at the moment - but always useful' .

An additional benefit of distance education may thus be that it can provide materials to be reserved for use at a later date.

Another said,

'Although interesting this text seemed rather far from my work at present and was therefore less relevant than others. However, it gave insight into middle school transfer at age 12'.

Others reflected the view that it was

'... unexpectedly interesting - challenging pre-conceived ideas - and succeeded in modifying many socially acquired ideas about adolescence. Some really useful ideas that have the potential to affect practice in our school. I was not able to observe in a secondary school but managed to talk to secondary teachers and young people to support my reading'.

Perhaps it is appropriate for the first module in particular to provide a balance between familiar and new information, or in some cases to give the teachers ways of understanding examples familiar in their practice. This may be an appropriate introduction to a course, enabling students to build on existing experience and perhaps give standing to some of their 'commonsense' knowledge. However, provision of this basic information early in the course may have resulted in some overloading of the students who commented frequently on the excessive workload of the module. Although all modules carry equal weighting, there can be some value in helping students to adapt to the course and gain confidence in their ability to cope with the material by ensuring that they are sufficiently challenged without feeling overloaded at this stage.

Teachers and speech and language therapists

The intricate linking of perceived novelty with difficulty of material and the tempering of these by the perception of relevance to practice is particularly significant in the evaluation of the material specifically addressing, 'The nature of speech and language difficulties'.

The relationship between teachers and speech and language therapists is partly influenced by differences in perception of speech and language difficulties. The distance learning course provided specific information for the teachers which had traditionally been the province of therapists. In the investigation of needs, teachers had said that they needed information about language development and language disability,

language description and assessment. However, in reality there is some ambivalence about the extent to which therapists and teachers need the same areas of knowledge. With reference to 'Language description', one teacher said:

'Is it necessary for the teacher to examine language in such detail as it is usually the speech therapists who analyse the children's language?'

This question is critical to the information on linguistics given to teachers in the course. In addition to questionnaire responses, verbal comments in a similar vein came from students and from tutors. Teachers and therapists have different but potentially complementary approaches to the analysis of language. In a course, there is a need to extend teachers' existing skills and knowledge and to enable them to access new knowledge which will be useful to them in their collaboration with colleagues. It is though important that they are able to understand each others' perspectives.

These areas form an essential part of the core curriculum for speech and language therapy. They could also inform teachers and help them to develop more appropriate curriculum and other learning experiences for pupils, perhaps in conjunction with therapy colleagues. The course was developing at the same time as emphasis on language in the curriculum was increasing. The national curriculum required teachers to record pupils' attainments in speaking and listening skills. Knowledge about language was becoming more explicitly part of the repertoire of all teachers.

If few teachers had background in language and its development, it would be even more unusual for them to have had opportunities to gain information in a systematic way on language disability, apart from what they could obtain from their own reading, from short courses or from colleagues. Further, even those who had made attempts to obtain information might have had some difficulties in understanding it without the preparatory background which would come from understanding language development and the contributory fields of language description, psycholinguistics and related disciplines. If

teachers viewed language, as had been suggested, largely from a perspective of social use (Daines, 1992; Roux 1990), then they would have difficulties in conceptualising language difficulty and the factors contributing to it. They would also have particular difficulty communicating with speech therapy colleagues.

In the investigation of needs teachers had been asked if they wished to know about 'theory of speech and language disorders'. This had been ranked only sixth in importance out of twelve priorities which the teachers wanted in a course. 'Language assessment' and 'normal language development' had been considered more important. 'Theory of speech and language disorders' was also given less importance than 'classroom management', 'working with parents', 'working with other professionals' and 'materials for use with children'. As the course was planned, information on language was intended to provide background which would underpin practice in teachers' work settings.

The title of the materials prepared for this part of the course, 'The nature of speech and language difficulties in children' may have resonated more closely with teachers' perceived needs than 'theory of speech and language'. The intention, under this heading was to present 'ways of thinking about...' or 'ways of understanding...' language difficulties. The survey and subsequent experience in developing the course suggested a need to modify the language of speech and language therapy for use in the arena of teacher development and this apparently small difference may represent very large implications for the mutual understanding of each others' communications by teachers and therapists.

In 'The nature of speech and language difficulties' the stated aims were to raise the students' awareness of the range of communication problems, to introduce terminology and to discuss some current models and theoretical perspectives on children's speech and language difficulties. A variety of examples from case studies were used and the students were expected to use pupils known to them for activities in the text. There was

also set reading and suggested reading for those interested to explore specific topics in more detail.

In considering the responses of the students to this material it may be relevant that it followed immediately the first text on 'Language description' which many of the students had found so difficult. It had also been preceded by all of the introductory information on language and language development. Feedback suggested the material had clear and obvious relevance to work with pupils.

One teacher considered this text to have been the

'most useful part of the course so far'

and one teacher started the comments with

'At last the nitty gritty'.

The contrast with 'Language description' was made:

'Find the practical, relevant, immediately meaningful aspect of (The Nature of speech and language difficulties) easier to understand and work with compared with Text 1 (Language description). Found it very useful to be able to read case studies'.

Some comments endorsed the impression that the students had some knowledge of this area already and that they appreciated further information to enhance this:

'It gave a great deal of cohesion to all the 'bits of knowledge' which I have picked up in the past in a very ad hoc way and gave an excellent overview'.

'I felt this text was right on target for me and the situation in which I work. ...will be of direct and immediate help. I will also pass on ideas to colleagues...'

'...particularly useful in helping me to focus on individual children's problems. It has helped me to go beyond the simple labelling of their disorder and think more in terms of their presenting problems'.

Further, in spite of the positive response by most of the respondents, and although there were *'a lot of papers to get through. These take a lot of time to read'* it was clear that

'more' on every section would have been appreciated. *'the whole idea of models could have had a lot more to it'*.

There seemed to be little doubt that this part of the course was useful to the teachers and that the ways of presenting language disability were relevant and meaningful to their practice. 'Theories of language difficulties' had been well received and apparently understood in spite of the large amount of reading and the new ideas presented.

The material on 'Language assessment' met with similar enthusiasm. There has perhaps always been some mystique over testing and assessment. Educational psychologists and speech therapists have historically used 'protected' procedures unavailable for use by other groups of practitioners. This emphasis may have decreased in favour of assessment in naturalistic settings although these approaches rely on detailed linguistic analysis which may serve to exclude teachers. In the initial survey, teachers had expressed a need to understand assessments undertaken by speech and language therapists. In 'the nature of speech and language assessment', several activities were included which asked the teachers to raise questions and discuss various aspects of assessment with their therapy or psychology colleagues. In the text on 'Language assessment in the classroom' various activities were given for the systematic assessment of language of children and of teachers.

These texts were generally seen to have immediate practical relevance, and were well received. A teacher reported that it was useful to have

'The "forced" opportunity to examine tests ...not previously explored. The confirmation that to look analytically and critically at tests and their appropriacy is highly relevant for their effective use'.

'... made one think more carefully about the validity of tests used'.

'This text gave me the opportunity to look more closely at our county's placement system - ie. how and why children find their way into our language

unit. For this reason alone it is invaluable to me. I will be referring to it for a long time to come'.

The activities which asked the teachers to discuss assessment with colleagues proved useful to some teachers but also highlighted some of the practical difficulties of professionals working together. The following positive comment

'This has been really useful in discussion with other professionals when sharing assessments of individual children- both in helping me to a greater understanding of their assessments and giving me more confidence in the validity and usefulness of my contributions which are largely observational'.

was countered by

'Not easy to find time to discuss with the ed. psych. or therapist or to be free when they are testing'.

The text on 'Language assessment in the classroom' was considered to be

'Easy to read, concise and to the point. All areas could have been expanded but this would have decreased the readability factor'.

'it was all so highly relevant and wonderful to see it written down and organised'

The activities in this text had generally been useful. They were largely related to the examination of teachers' conversations in class with children and in both of the first two cohorts respondents suggested that it had been particularly useful to examine their own utterances in their communications with children, one commenting

'This text was highly relevant. After reading (a paper on adults talking to children) I wasn't sure that I should ever open my mouth in the classroom again!'

Summary

A large amount of very varied material has been presented in this chapter, which highlights even further the importance of considering individual students' interactions with a course's content. In drawing together the evaluation, perhaps the most striking impression is the motivation of the teachers to improve their practice. They convey a strong desire to understand what is going on, with their pupils and with their colleagues from other professions. In order to do this, they are willing to spend time in trying things out in the classroom and undertaking additional reading. It is clear however, that practitioners do not have time to waste. Positive and negative responses are linked with students' perceptions of novelty, amount, difficulty and relevance of information and there are no direct solutions for a course developer. Outcomes of a course or part of a course do not have a specific cause and effect. They are rather the result of complex interactions between many factors within and around students, the materials and the ways in which they are organised.

In the particular context of a course in speech and language difficulties in education, there are challenges in finding an appropriate combination of information about language and language difficulties to meet with teachers' expectations. The aim must be to achieve a balance which can promote specific competence to work in the specialism. The materials must be developed with awareness of what teachers already know or what they see others around them doing.

Inflexibility of materials is sometimes cited as a problem for distance education. This may, indeed, be a disadvantage in large scale courses where elaborate production processes make rapid modification difficult. However, a professional development course must be professionally-responsive. A relatively small-scale course, produced 'in-house', can be altered in response to demands of participants, who must see evidence that their comments are heard. The evaluations presented in this chapter have shown that modifications can and must be made where the course material is perceived as

inappropriate. This facility is a distinct advantage of the type of small-scale professional development programme explored in this study.

The importance of relevance to practice is particularly highlighted and warrants further examination in a course for professional development. In particular, when the course is by distance education, this may need special attention. In the next chapter, the potential for distance education to influence practice will be further explored.

CHAPTER 7: EVALUATING APPLICATION TO CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Introduction

In the last chapter, students' positive and negative evaluations of aspects of course content appeared to be strongly linked with their perceptions of its relevance to their practice. The teachers were motivated by a desire to develop their practice and to link ideas gained from the course with their day-to-day work. An important aspect of the evaluation must be consideration of whether distance education has the potential to affect the practice of professionals and thus be a serious option for professional development.

If the course was to benefit students' practice an attempt had to be made to ensure that concepts introduced were relevant to practice. Few teachers had specialist qualifications in speech and language and there was no mandatory qualification. No required competences had been externally defined. In the field of language and language disability, there is a considerable knowledge base from which to select information for a course. Theoretical developments have accelerated in recent years with research in several overlapping fields of study (linguistics; psycholinguistics; cognitive neuropsychology). There have also been changes in thinking about education. All of the course participants came with experience in schools and could be assumed to have some relevant knowledge and skills. The investigation of needs suggested that the course should include some reflection on the teachers' existing knowledge, developments from this knowledge and also some areas which would be completely new to them. In many ways, it is easy to see how distance education could aim to provide further 'knowledge'. Written text is a traditional means of transmitting information. Changing practice might be more difficult, especially 'at a distance'. In the development of the study materials, an attempt was made to engage the students in a process which essentially tied activity (or practice) with knowledge (or theory) which could inform it.

The planning and management of the curriculum is central to teachers' work. The material in this chapter, which focuses on curriculum, has therefore been selected as most closely linked with classroom practice. The potential for distance education to develop teachers' practice is explored

Reflections on the curriculum module

Curriculum planning is at the heart of teachers' professional activities. In developing a course in speech and language difficulties, the linking of knowledge about language with curriculum development activities is the key to the specialism. The first module of the second year of the course focused on curriculum. Discussions with a planning group for this module suggested that it might be somewhat complex and controversial. There were a number of different ideas on how it should be organised. Some saw a need to inform students about the curriculum reforms taking place at the time; others discussed subject areas and how the teaching of them could be modified for pupils with language difficulties; others considered that an approach to principles of curriculum development would be appropriate. After considerable discussion, the group agreed that there was a need for students on the course to be given examples of practice and to be helped to reflect on their own practice.

The module focused on a reflective and self-critical approach to teaching. It was planned to assess the work through the teachers' own reports of their practice. As experienced practitioners, the teachers would have their own theories of teaching and learning, expressed or at a less conscious level. The course could develop further their 'theories in use' (Schön, 1983) and would aim to develop practice by enhancing knowledge and by helping the teachers to relate the knowledge to their day-to-day work.

The materials

The resulting material was developed as :

'Planning for curriculum delivery' with examples from one teacher's lessons in science together with commentary on planning processes and evaluations of the lessons taught.

'Curriculum requirement, access and recording' gave the principles of the national curriculum together with readings from current documents. Three detailed examples of curriculum activities were given, focusing on mathematics, science and reading with pupils of different ages, including one on video. Within this material a substantial activity was presented, in stages, requiring students to write a lesson plan, to carry out teaching, evaluate it and teach a further lesson based on their evaluation. The report on this activity would form the assignment for the module.

The material sent out to students was somewhat different from previous modules. In volume it was considerably smaller, although it was intended that the activities should represent a similar amount of student effort. The style of writing and presentation were also different, particularly in the first text, which consisted largely of reproductions of worksheets from a science lesson, for pupils with different abilities, with comments.

Reactions of students

Initially 18 responses were received from 30 students. However, some of the questionnaires were returned quickly and themes began to emerge from the students' responses to being asked to examine specific classroom practice.

Firstly, there was a view that the curriculum material was already familiar to the teachers. For the text: 'Planning for curriculum delivery', one of the first questionnaires to be returned expressed a strong negative response:

'I consider this module an insult ...I resent being assessed on my planning and teaching - it's not what I came on the course for and frankly I haven't got the time to waste'.

In the same envelope was the evaluation of the second text, which read:

'You really ought to find out what teachers are already doing not assume that we don't know how to meet SEN. This was just teaching your grandmother to suck eggs'.

Other comments, whilst not so vehemently expressed, were not entirely enthusiastic and there were suggestions that the material was

not new challenging material'

although, along the spectrum of reactions, another student was reassured by the perceived familiarity of the material:

'Feel as though the pressure has eased up somewhat and I am now on firmer ground. Curriculum is much more like home ground. Feel the course has made me more confident'.

Contrasting responses were characteristic. Almost every feature of the module provoked negative and positive evaluations. A second theme revolved around the examples of practice which had been presented. One respondent said:

'After 27 years as a qualified teacher planning is so much a routine part of day to day /week by week /termly teaching that I referred to this text only as a matter of interest. I do not feel that being critical of someone else's work has really helped me to evaluate my own way of planning'

This negative response presents a paradox as it is difficult to see how examples could be given without presenting someone's activities. Further, whilst this student did not see value in commenting on another person's practice, neither did they wish to reflect on their own. The opportunity to observe and learn from others is probably not afforded to many teachers who work in isolation in their classrooms. In other aspects of the course evaluation (see tutorial evaluations) teachers valued highly the discussions of their work with other teachers in similar circumstances.

In contrast, other teachers responded that it had been 'most useful' to consider someone else's practice:

'...having the opportunity to look closely at the forward planning and evaluation of somebody working in a different context'

'Reminder of someone else's lesson plans. Activities proved interesting'

The systematic planning and evaluation of curriculum activities was found by some students to be both interesting and useful:

'... I had a lot of background planning to do before I could get down to the teaching session'.

'At last we are working on material directly based on classroom experience. In my opinion there should be much more emphasis on the practical issues related to the management of children with speech and language difficulties in teaching/learning situations'.

The teachers had engaged in very different ways with the same materials and the outcomes for the students had, in many cases, been different from what had been planned. Reflective practice had not resulted in every case and the more negative and strongly worded comments were striking. The dilemma was to know how to respond. One response to the question 'how interesting did you find the material' particularly illustrates the idiosyncratic nature of the involvement with the work:

'Text not very interesting but work it generated certainly was'.

There was a difference between the response to the content and the process elements of the materials. The planning group had been concerned to affect the teachers through the process of planning and evaluating curriculum by providing them with a framework. It was considered that there would be more value in looking at the 'how' of planning than on what to plan. The course materials could act as a support to the processes of thinking about the curriculum for pupils with speech and language difficulties. Less importance

had been given to the content of the curriculum areas, but, perhaps because the national curriculum is subject-focused, the teachers expected specific ideas and activities based on curriculum content. Some of the more negative evaluations suggested that the material did not represent many new ideas. It was considered 'boring' and 'not very interesting' in two cases. Although the majority found the material 'highly relevant' or 'relevant', two respondents found it either 'mostly' or 'totally' irrelevant.

In view of these evaluations there was a need to examine what the respondents thought had not been given sufficient consideration or what else they would have liked in the material. Several requested specific examples addressing effective curriculum planning for children with a variety of needs. They had not found enough in the texts that they could adapt or relate to their own work.

'Would have liked more in depth content on differentiation'.

'I would have preferred a list of activities, schemes etc which have been found over the years to be of help to teachers of speech and language children'.

'Suggest that this module could be expanded to involve more aspects of curriculum development, teaching methods and intervention in different settings'.

The ability of the material to touch people in different ways was highlighted. Whereas some teachers appeared not to have engaged in the activities because of their irrelevance, others clearly saw positive effects. Even where the subject matter was not new, some nevertheless were able to derive benefit and to consider ideas in a new light. Positive evaluations placed clear emphasis on the experience of the activities and the challenge presented by the process of planning, 'delivering' and evaluating the curriculum in practice.

'forced me to look critically at my teaching style'.

'... clarified my thinking and made abstract issues that I've previously accepted eg. assessment cycle, really relevant'.

'We all talk about access and differentiation. A very explicit description of these in this module - useful for all those involved in teaching. It wasn't new but it did crystallise my thoughts'.

With specific reference to the assignment, a teacher wrote that it was

'very different. ... particularly useful for re-thinking curriculum ideas and re-planning a specific curriculum area. It cleared 'grey areas' and gave impetus for other tasks - not specifically related to the course'.

A few of the responses presented paradoxical comments by suggesting that the curriculum activity was not well received because it required too much time and detailed thinking:

'A very readable text but very thin. There could have been more of everything in it. The practical assignment was a good one but the word limit was very restricting. Everything had to be reduced to the bare minimum'.

'Time to actually work in the way described in the essay just would not be available and it would be impossible to record every teaching session in so much detail. ... A plus for the exercise was actually going through the process which can only heighten already aware minds'.

Linked with this is the view of the teacher who suggests that further insight into language disability would be preferable to focusing on curriculum planning, which was seen to be 'too vast' to consider:

'...Found the assignment difficult because I largely found it an unrealistic task ...every school is going through the process of evaluating their curriculum delivery. The amount of information necessary was vast if total justice was to be done. I would far rather have been looking at a more specific area of language ...'

This teacher does not seem to have made the important association between knowledge about language disability and curriculum activities. There was no immediate interaction between information from the first year of the course and the processes of classroom activity.

Tutors' views

Not surprisingly, the tutors had comments about these texts which had been discussed at some length in their tutorial groups. Their comments can be summarised as, the students *'didn't like it'*. They reported that the students had *'found it hard'* and that *'it was so different'*. One tutor suggested that *'the style was extremely patronising'*. Although some students were positive and described personal gains, too many teachers did not see the material in the way that was intended. Those who found it irrelevant, insufficient or inappropriate for their needs gave cause for concern. Paradoxically, in spite of some of the negative reactions to the material there had been some excellent assignments written for this module with evaluations of practice which showed a great deal of useful insight. Tutors commented very positively on these and a number of the assignments were deemed *'worthy of further dissemination'* by the external examiner.

Reflections

The responses reported above were gained at the time students were undertaking or had recently completed the module. Interviews with teachers from the first cohort who had completed the course elicited reflection on the material. They were asked to comment on how they considered the course had affected their practice. Some spontaneously linked changes particularly with their work on the curriculum module.

- CM *'Some people hated that assignment but some people...'*
20 *'I think you did until you got into it, because it was so inward looking and whereas to some extent the course was a relaxation from school because it was sort of lifting you on to a different plane and you were interacting with the subject at a different level ... suddenly to be thrown back into sort of looking right inside what you were doing. It was a bit ...'*
- CM *'Hard?'*
20 *'Yes, but once you got into it, it - in many ways perhaps it was the best thing - although painful'*
- 21 ... *'I did a maths assignment, and I actually had it taped and I played it the other day ... I was much more thorough but I think I did gain in the differentiation and listening to myself even setting out instructions, and I would think, no I shouldn't have said that to that*

*child or that helped. But I mean, I know I can't tape everything I do but I am more aware
...looking at yourself, it's a very hard thing to do but at the end you do get something out of it'*

This suggests that for some participants, reflection goes on over time and whilst there is some discomfort in the reflective process, the benefits continue when the pain has diminished. Additionally, for some teachers, the assignment had been influential in changing procedures in their unit and school.

7 *'Things like the package that we had to work out for teaching and recording - we actually use that now throughout the unit for topic plans and then the lesson plans and then the recording sheet ... so that was useful to get that sorted out'*

In remembering this part of the course, none of these teachers mentioned aspects of the content. Each of them reflected on the process of the activities, seeming to have gained benefit from this opportunity to undertake a task which caused them to examine everyday, essential teaching activities. They seem to have been able to generalise the processes into different contexts and subject areas, using them as a vehicle for the content of curriculum, which they generated themselves.

Revising the material: reframing the problem

The terms 'action research' and 'teacher as researcher' are particularly appropriate to practitioners in schools, who would otherwise consider themselves too busy or unable to undertake anything which could be described as research. The approach to the curriculum in the course materials was, in all but name, potentially in the action research mode. It aimed to help students to understand pedagogical processes of curriculum planning by engaging in it and reflecting on it. Simply providing ideas for activities and materials would not be helpful and could not provide for the needs of every student and their individual work settings. The opportunity to exchange ideas of this nature should perhaps be encouraged more through tutorials and other face-to-face

meetings of students. An explicit action research approach offered a possibility of presenting the principles of the module in a different way.

The questions asked

The apparent shock with which some of the teachers had responded to being asked to look at their practice raised a number of questions.

Was it the act of assessing teaching?

A few of the responses suggested that the teachers objected to examination of their practice. They were already experienced and this seemed, to them, to be evidence that they were 'good enough' teachers. They suggested that the material only presented what they were doing already. On the other hand, teachers who were more positive about the materials had found the activity useful, although some were still a little surprised at being asked to undertake such tasks. Some of the teachers had engaged with the material mainly at the level of curriculum content and found this inappropriate for their personal requirements.

Was it because the material gave examples of others' practice?

Some teachers did not consider it useful to see how another teacher worked, whilst others found it interesting and helpful. It is difficult to imagine how examples can be given without looking at people's practice but the students may have needed more useful guidance on how to make the most of these. No examples will precisely meet the needs of every individual and it may be necessary to provide more help for students in generalising from them so that they can make examples more personally relevant.

Could more specific examples have been given?

Although the material presented examples of lessons with children with language difficulties, the material was mostly described as 'not new'. The teachers asked for more detail on differentiation and assessment and examples of programmes and schemes

which had been found useful to others. This suggests the teachers would like to know more about what others do but the idea that any course can provide specific examples pertinent to the needs of each member is unrealistic. Students need help in extracting principles and general philosophies which can then provide frameworks for their particular contexts. A course can not hope to provide an example for every daily problem a teacher might meet. Indeed, there could be little value in such an approach. The teacher who reported

'I am disappointed that I am not gaining any specialist skills, only further insight into the difficulties caused by language impairment'

needed to be helped to see that *'further insight'* was exactly what could be used to develop already-existing teaching skills to provide a better education for children with language disabilities. Understanding of pupils' difficulties should facilitate planning for their learning. The course needed to enhance the teachers' belief and confidence in their existing skills and new knowledge so that they could 'suck eggs' more effectively in new situations.

Was the style inappropriate ?

Although only one person, a tutor, had suggested that the style might be at fault, this comment seemed important. The material was presented very differently from other modules and several of the pages were worksheets, diagrams, pictures and comments in a teacher's handwriting. Perhaps the teachers did feel patronised or demeaned by this. Perhaps it did not accord with what they considered appropriate for a university course. One teacher said

'this part of the course has not taught me anything new but regard it as excellent in-service training'

as though this was somehow on a different level, perhaps more practice-based and even, possibly, less rigorous. The perception of this course as something other than 'inservice'

was surprising but is perhaps significant to teachers. They may regard 'inservice' work, based on practice, as requiring less thought and less demanding. If this was the case, it would be an important consideration in the revision of the module. Practice could not be presented as a set of ideas, activities, methods or skills but would need to be linked convincingly with supporting theory and stimuli for reflection with a clear rationale for this approach.

Curriculum planning as action research

The majority of respondents saw the material as 'relevant' and there were some teachers who considered that 'at last' the course was beginning to deal with their day-to-day work. This suggested that a revision should still focus on aspects of the curriculum. Possible revisions were discussed with two of the tutors, one of whom had been an author of the original materials. The other was adamant that the course should not allow itself to become 'tips for teachers'. She believed that a focus on curriculum planning and development was essential but a different form of presentation might be helpful. She gave examples from assignments from her group of students which exemplified the type of work she considered valuable. A decision was made to use some of these in the revision of the materials. A group of teachers was asked if their work could be used in the development of the module. None refused and one wrote back:

'After a quick re-read (of the assignment) I have to say that it was undertaken as a special effort to get to grips with 'science' ...it was an extremely valuable exercise in that we have now absorbed all those laborious steps into mental activity. The exercise can now be used for (other) subjects. ... Currently we are trying to get to grips with humanities so this model can be used again. ... it was one of the most beneficial assignments as far as my own teaching style was concerned'.

A template for the processes of planning for practice can develop thinking which can be used more rapidly and easily later. This stage of rather mechanical 'competence' as a basis for the development of later, more flexible 'expertise' can link new knowledge in speech and language difficulties with curriculum processes. Perhaps the module represented for the teachers a form of 'going back' to an earlier stage of their

development. It would be important, in any revision, to persuade students of the potential value of undertaking the exercises in the context of a course in speech and language difficulties. The comment from the teacher above was included as part of the introduction to the curriculum activities in the revised text.

The revised module explicitly used examples of planning from the assignments of former students from the course. Other worksheet material was deleted. The whole activity-based assignment was presented as 'action research'. The philosophy of action research was outlined and an analogy was drawn between the processes of curriculum development and the reflective processes implicit in action research. The fundamental concepts of the module were retained but were presented in a different conceptual framework so that the teachers could develop new ways of seeing them. Modifications were made to the detail of the activity by requiring teachers to provide more information on the pupils' language needs and how they would be met in lessons and by describing how other people, including assistants and speech-language therapists, would be involved in the activities. This requirement aimed to address the teachers' perceived and real need to develop specific skills to work in the context of speech and language difficulties. The students were given questions to ask about the curriculum plans provided. Examples of practice were given in a separate booklet and the teachers were given a paper to read on the relationship between teaching in class and speech and language therapy programme objectives. Sections from the original material on differentiation and record keeping were retained. The focus of the material was still more on action and the processes of practice, than on the content of assessment or teaching.

Responses to the new material

The most immediate responses came from the tutors who, in summary, said that the material was '*much better*'. It was perhaps a sign that the students were happier with the materials that few of them responded until a special plea for feedback was sent out.

12 out of the 27 teachers who were about to complete the course in 1994 returned questionnaires.

The table of responses to the new material gives an overview of the reactions.

All respondents considered the amount of time spent on the work to have been 'reasonable'.

Table 7.1 Response to the revised curriculum planning material

Amount of work	Excessive 0	Reasonable 12	Insufficient 0		
Level of difficulty *N=11	Very diffc't 0	Difficult 1	Fair 7	Easy 2	Very easy 1
Clarity of presentation *N=11	Very clear 2	Clear 4	Adequate 5	Much unclear 0	Totally unclear 0
Level of interest	Very inter. 4	Interesting 5	Fair 3	Not Very Interesting 0	Boring 0
How new	Very new 0	Much new 1	Parts new 8	Most not new 3	None new 0
Relevance	Highly 7	Relevant 1	Fairly 4	Mostly irrelevant 0	Totally irrevelant 0

In contrast to the earlier evaluations when all respondents said that most of the material was not new, three quarters of these respondents found something new in the material and all found something of relevance.

Among more positive responses, a teacher who had found the material 'very interesting', 'new in parts' and 'highly relevant' wrote that the most useful aspect was the focus on 'what actually happens' (in curriculum planning). Other teachers said

'One of the most useful to date. Directly relevant and now a part of planning processes'.

'Very useful text for developing ideas about recording. ... adopted ideas from this'.

The concept of action research was seen to be particularly useful by some of the teachers. However, when asked to say what, in the materials, was not given sufficient consideration, it was clear that some students still wished for very specific examples:

'Other subject areas (than the ones exemplified in the text) history, geography, French - what do you do with these? - the same principles as science and maths or different strategies?

Distance education and practice

The responses above suggest that distance education has the potential to influence practice, although for a professional development programmes, appropriate design of materials for the nature of the subject area and the particular group of participants is critical.

The students' own views of distance education were sought in the final evaluations. They were asked: 'Would you choose distance learning again for this type of specialist course?'

19 respondents said 'yes'

8 said 'no'

Three of the eight respondents who marked 'no' gave the following reasons:

14 *'Too much work without sufficient feedback. I think short courses are better'*

17 *'I felt very isolated and I often magnified problems and stresses which could have been alleviated by chatting to another local student'.*

22 *'Too little continual and regular contact/support'*

These responses suggest that different arrangements during the course or different preparation of the students before undertaking the course might have helped them to feel more positive about distance education. Perhaps increased contact with a tutor or the encouragement of more contact with other students might have helped them.

Others were more convinced that distance learning was not the best way to professional development and several of the responses suggested that pressure and workload were important in their views:

- 19 *'Time was difficult for me. I would wait for secondment. I think it depends on your personal circumstances'.*
- 24 *'To attempt to fulfill the expectations of a university while carrying out a full-time job can be very frustrating. One does not have time for background reading or opportunity for all the required practical assignments.'*
- 26 *'I would prefer full-time study. Too hectic a workload to give enough attention to course'*

In spite of these comments, however, when interviewed, two of these respondents expressed some ambivalence about the experience of distance learning, accepting that there can be advantages and that full-time or campus-based courses are not necessarily the answer (see 26 below). There was no suggestion that they did not benefit from the course, despite the fact that they would not undertake distance learning again. Other parts of their interview suggest that they both perceived positive changes as a result of the course.

Loneliness in learning was expressed particularly by respondent 17. She lived further away from the rest of the tutorial group members,

- 17 *'... if there had been somebody you know in (town) or even somebody in (county) It just was that they often, because they were close, A and S and H would often pop round and discuss an essay together ...*
- CM *... for preference would you do a full-time course do you think?*
- 17 *...I would like to feel that there was someone quite local to me, that ... we could share information or lend each other books or something ...*
- CM *It was tough*
- 17 *It was, but anyway I'm really glad I did it*
- CM *and you survived*
- 17 *and I survived, and learned a lot*

Lack of contact also seems to have been seen as a disadvantage by respondent 26

'Yes, a full time course, although having said, well maybe a full time course, more say at night ... I feel you still need to be in contact with the children ... so when I say full time, I really mean ... (seems to be describing a part-time, campus-based arrangement)

Earlier in the interview, she had said

- No there isn't any other way I can't see that at all*
- CM *No, no, so you managed it though*
- 26 *We are all still here*
- CM *You survived. ... Yea, I think it isn't easy though that is it? You just have to fit it in to your life at the time I think don't you?*
- 26 *Well that's it. If you just, you know, decide well this is what I've got to do and just put your mind to it, and as long as everybody else around you accommodates you, you get on very well. I mean I was lucky with that, because of family commitments. Everybody realised the pressure and knew if I snapped, I really didn't mean it.*

Teacher 6 expressed the most negative view of all. She appeared to have been under particular pressure during the course. Other parts of the interview with her suggest that she had felt little benefit from the whole experience

'Very hard work, I mean, it's timing at the moment with the upheaval in schools. It's particularly difficult, I mean, a few years ago it wouldn't have been so bad, because maybe you could have cruised a little bit more in the daytime, but at the moment with ... being thrust upon us and sort of extra staff meetings and everything else, I mean it has come at a particularly bad time. I have found the last ... two and half years fairly horrendous'

For those who said they would choose distance learning again, some variations on themes emerged. Nine of these respondents were unequivocal, believing that distance learning was the best way for them, suggesting that the style of course fitted well with their particular routines and commitments.

- 4 *I like the freedom of choosing my own study time although support is there if needed'*
- 12 *It fits very well with my busy schedule - full-time job, working mother*

- 13 *I think this type of learning is a concentrated attack by a centre of excellence so that the student gets the best available knowledge and is able to fit learning in with a job and family*

One of these respondents had already completed Open University courses and saw the potential relevance to practice of a course by distance learning.

- 15 *... I like to try out the ideas and practice in my day-to-day work. Distance learning is less disruptive of family life.*

Others who favoured distance learning offered a mixture of reasons related to practicality of study, the application of their learning to practice and often also acknowledged that reality would not allow them to attend a campus-based course.

- 9 *I am realistic and know that secondment, which is the ideal solution, is not viable in the present financial circumstances. Distance learning provides a solution but at some cost. This course brings to an end 6 years of distance learning (Open University and Birmingham) and I have spent this holiday removing some tremendous cobwebs and my daughter commented that I actually cracked a joke.*

- 11 *...with budgetary constraints as they are at present I think that this type of course is ideal for people who are not able to take time off or go away from home for courses. One particular plus for this type of course is that it draws on experience and has a substantial influence on practice as one goes along.*

There were comments however, about the pressure of the course without acknowledgment from employers that study time was necessary.

- 16 *I appreciate the flexibility of distance learning, I am well motivated; fortunately I have had a lot of support from my colleagues at work. However, it is difficult to work and study at the same time. Authorities should be strongly encouraged to finance study leave as well as course fees.*
- 7 *Provided more study time could be found from working situation - at times the work load when it coincided with busy times at work was almost unbearable*

The interviews pursued these views further and provided an opportunity for the teachers to think aloud about the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning.

- 9 ... *secondment's the ideal thing, but I mean in this day and age, it's just totally unrealistic, there isn't any money ...*
- CM *Do you think you could have done more, by being on a full time course or got more out of it?*
- 9 *That's difficult to say, because through practice and ... I gained a lot, but I was also very, very frustrated and I didn't have enough time to do everything, never, ever enough time.*
-
- 15 ... *I think it worked for me, but then ... I haven't got children yet and I've got a supportive husband ... so ... it worked, I think, because I had the time and was able to do it. And yes, ideally I'd much rather have a year off, and be able to do it, sort of, all the time or something. It would be lovely. ... it was hard work, you know, you've got to be prepared to do it haven't you? It's just amazing when I went to my tutorials, you know that people were dealing with children and goodness knows what*
... Yes, I think for me, I suppose it worked well because I did have the good tutor and tutorials, you know, I mean, if I was just on my own I couldn't do it very well. I sort of do need some explanation sometimes and some guidance.

A teacher who had already completed a course through the Open University felt that there were particular advantages that would not be available on a full-time course.

- 18 *I like to be actually carrying out the ideas, I like the sort of day-to-day work. Obviously your work does not improve if there isn't, you know, research. And for me it becomes real if I can relate it to my work you know, you read something and you think, oh I don't know and then you're in a situation with a child and you say, Oh - I can see what the writer meant and it sort of sparks you off.*

Others who would choose distance learning again said

- 27 ... *mainly because of where we live. ...*
- CM *But if there was a locally based course that's what you would choose is it really?*
- 27 *Well, it depends on what the course was. ... But I honestly think that the materials are of a very high standard from Birmingham, .. I don't*

want to be slightly short changed, because I do use them ... the modules are there to go back to ...

- 8 *... it is good that you can go back and try it straight away, whereas if you were working on a course, you know, fulltime, you wouldn't have time to go back to a classroom and try it immediately and then the impetus has gone to some extent*
- 11 *... I think it's genuinely a good way of doing it. ... I think it makes it very experiential and I think that's the main thing about a course like this. You can constantly relate it to the work you are doing, whereas if you go off and do something ... I think probably by the time you've come back lots of what you have learned, you've either forgotten or it sort of got over-laid somehow, so you can't perhaps try it in quite the same way. This seemed to me like, you know, very much, it's going on all the time and affecting what we were doing all the time, 'cos I think from that point of view its a good way of doing it.*
- 16 *... I like the flexibility of the fact that you knew what was required and when it had to be done by and OK, if you had a particularly bad day or whatever, well you didn't do any study that evening.
... I think it really is practically based as well as theoretically. If you were actually not working, I think I would have found it much more frustrating, I could never have tried things out or sorted things out. So I was quite pleased that you could go into work and ...*
- 21 *I think there are advantages because, you can apply it I didn't feel it was overwhelming.... when you are writing assignments for a week or so that you were really bogged down, but they were spaced out well enough, you had time to sort of think about what you were doing and if you had something at school that you had to be getting on with you could put - you didn't have to be always every night studying.*

The most positive responses do suggest that distance education can be linked with practitioners' day-to-day work. However, the combined pressures from their employment and from the course can colour the reactions of some teachers. They are though realistic about the opportunities for full-time study in a climate of economic stringency.

From theory to practice

The responses above suggest that some of the teachers spontaneously integrated the course with their day-to-day work and found distance education particularly appropriate for this. Perhaps because the final questionnaires asked the student about the balance of theory to practice in the course, they were bound to perceive differences. This focus of the evaluation may have served to perpetuate a distinction. However, the responses to questions linking 'theory and practice' suggest some of the ways in which the teachers saw their own learning during the course.

In the final questionnaire, to which 27 (82%) of the first cohort of 30 responded, the teachers were asked how they remembered the balance of theory and practice in the course:

6 students considered that there was 'too much theory'

1 considered there was 'too much practice'

20 rated the balance 'about right'

The respondents were asked to assess this in terms of the relevance of the course to the practice of teaching. The responses were:

Highly relevant	12
Relevant	9
Fairly relevant	3
Mostly irrelevant	2
Totally irrelevant	0

To probe this further, they were first asked if they thought their thinking had changed as a result of the course and next whether they considered that their practice had changed. This may have been an inappropriate and unrealistic division and the question itself may have influenced the responses. The two dimensions were perceived as follows:

	Thinking changed (N=27 responses)	Practice changed (N=26 responses)
A lot	17	12
A little	9	13
Not at all	1	1

Although not identical, a number of the responses indicated that the teachers saw little difference in these two aspects of their work. In the narratives following their responses, some mentioned, under 'changes in thinking', ways in which they were now doing things differently. The apparently clear distinction they seemed to see between theory and practice in reality is somewhat blurred and the responses refute to some extent, the views of those authors who suggest that teachers are not interested in theory. During interviews the teachers provided comments on these dimensions of learning which suggest the complex interlinking of theory and practice in their minds:

20 *I'm not sure whether it's the assignment I did for you which fed from the work I'd done for the service or the other way round but I certainly did so much thinking*

8 *I was able to work it in with what I was doing.*

The immediate possibility of trying something out at school was significant for some:

20 *... I just have to get the facts under my belt first and get the theory and then look at what's really going on and how it applies. ... I was getting the practical alongside and that made the course so exciting 'cos suddenly things made sense ... fell into focus more*

16 *... I enjoyed the theory behind it ... some of the things that we were reading about on the theory side, some of the suggestions that they'd got in the books. I could go into school and try some various bits and pieces out ...you could see it, you know, it's like the sort of action research module, I suppose you've got the theory behind it, you can try something out. You can see the effects it has and then you can go on*

Processes of learning

In addition to what they had gained, some teachers were able to articulate the ways in which they had learned. One described the general process which she saw as relevant to her practice :

- 9 *I am intellectually more able to examine, analyse and make judgements which are essential to future action...I know I am a better practitioner because of the learning process offered by your course. You know you sort of absorb what you do and you no longer have to go through all those thought processes*

One teacher had not experienced immediate effects but had become aware of benefits from a change in her working context which had provided opportunities to share some of the ideas:

- CM *you thought that the course was too theoretical?*
27 *At the time*
CM *At the time? What - you don't think that now?*
27 *I'm actually using a lot of the theory now.
... I used to make activities because common sense told me they would work - now I can explain to others why they work. This then makes the next steps easier ...*

In contrast, the respondent who thought there had been no changes to her thinking, her practice or her work context seems to have been unable to engage in this type of social exchange. She said:

- CM *... and what about - the support you had in your work context, ...
How was yours?*
6 *None at all.*
CM *None at all - so colleagues didn't want to know what you were doing?*
6 *No, no, I'm not even sure how many people - I suppose people knew I was doing something, but they - no, I wouldn't say anybody was particularly interested.*

Learning to learn : looking back

The other main area of change perceived by the teachers was in their ability to evaluate their own and others' work by reflecting and thinking more critically. For one, this was apparent as

- 9 *I am more critical when reading research or relevant material. I am more self-critical and question my own practice more often. I am more willing to undertake investigation rather than accept the opinions of others about what is happening. I think the answer is that undertaking the course has changed me.*

The effect on another teacher was that

- 23 *'I now question the relevance of statements made about language disability by myself, others and in print. Previously I may just have accepted that said by others'*

and another said

- 27 *'I now have the ability to select reading matter ... which will be relevant to my work.'*

The interviews with 16 teachers (49% of the first cohort), eight months after the questionnaires, probed further reflections on their experiences. For some, the interviews were an opportunity to say more than they had written in the questionnaires and to give specific examples to illustrate their views. For others, there had been changes in the views given in the questionnaires eight months earlier. For example, two teachers seemed to change their judgement on the magnitude of the change they had expressed in the questionnaire

- CM *... you thought your thinking changed a lot and your practice changed a little?*
9 *Yeah, I think the biggest thing that it did, was to give me confidence and maybe my practice has changed more than I realised after that.*
- CJM *... you said that your thinking changed a little,*
21 *I think really it is far more than a little.*

At the time of the interviews, some of the teachers were still studying, having transferred to a masters dissertation.

- 11 *I think if you get a sort of spark with a course like this ... I think it does tune you in to issues and from there you can take it on. I certainly think that things like journals and that sort of thing, which were an absolute closed book to me before*
- CM *Were they...?*
11 *I do - I can pick up and actually not know everything certainly ... but a lot of it I can understand and then it makes - I think it makes you*

more willing to have a go and see what you can accumulate for yourself after that and certainly doing the MEd ... I hope that it'll take me on, you know, beyond the time when I finish. I think I shall miss it terribly

CM *Would you say that you are still working on things that have come from the course?*

9 *Oh yes, yes, definitely. Yes, and I find that I'm much more alert to other people's work. I mean I've ordered loads of magazines ... I scan the ones ... I think might be useful and read them in depth.*

18 *... I feel I still would like to have a reading list and someone to suggest reading ...with suggestions as to which literature is relevant to the work of students. ... You know, you are never finished learning about your subject are you? And there's research work coming out from time to time which affects practice.*

Summary

The interaction of course members with the materials and with the structures of the educational institution has effects which will be significant for the outcomes of the course and for judgements of its success. In addition to broad effects, outcomes are also highly individual. The same material in the course is received differently by different members and it is clear that individual responses are linked with a range of factors. Distance learning was a new experience for most of the students and whilst some responded positively both to the mode of learning and its effects on their practice, other students found this type of study extremely stressful. Many of the respondents suggested that they saw distance education as a compromise alternative to traditional forms of professional development, acknowledging that it was all that was available to them in present circumstances.

The close interaction of theory with day-to-day practice appeared as a theme and suggested that the course could be effective in developing classroom practice. This suggests that there was considerable importance in the teachers remaining in their posts as they undertook the course. However, the critical importance of classroom practice meant that this part of the course needed to be particularly sensitive to student criticism.

The need to modify materials in response to student feedback was apparent and again, the advantages of a small-scale distance education course were seen in this respect. The potential for the course to interact with teachers' work settings as part of the system began to appear. The material presented in this chapter already suggests that it may be useful to see a professional development activity as a system in which 'technical' aspects are closely linked with social-emotional aspects of students' lives and working environments.

The developments in the teachers' knowledge and skill in working with pupils with speech and language difficulties must also enhance their confidence to collaborate effectively with speech and language therapists. In the next chapter, the ways in which the course interacts with the teachers' work context and their professional relationships is explored.

CHAPTER 8: THE COURSE IN THE WORK SETTING

Introduction

The information presented in the last two chapters suggests some of the factors important in the students' evaluations of the worth of the course. Many of them placed considerable emphasis on the classroom application of the materials and activities and there was evidence that distance education could influence practice. The action research framework for the study allowed for a process of pausing, re-thinking and planning additional activities as part of the research. This provided opportunities to examine the course from different viewpoints and triangulate feedback from the participants. In the questionnaires and interviews, several of the teachers made reference to their colleagues and how they had been involved as they went through the course. It was rare for the teachers to have found their colleagues totally uninterested and some described very clearly ways in which their colleagues had made direct attempts to assist them in the course activities. The opportunity to share the experience of the course with supportive colleagues was important to a number of the teachers and may have been a critical aid to their learning.

Additionally, whilst respondents talked about how colleagues had supported them in various ways some also suggested that people at work had vicariously benefitted from their participation in the course. As one teacher remarked:

'Teaching colleagues seem to feel they have participated in the course by proxy'

The influence on practice may therefore have been not only at the level of the individual course participant but on a wider group. In this chapter, a further view of the course is presented by exploring it as part of a wider system.

Students and their colleagues

The teachers' work context began to be considered as an essential sub-system, without which the course could not operate. Further, the particular features of a teacher's work setting appeared relevant to that teacher's view of the course.

Examples of colleagues' support and involvement were noted:

' ... papers that I've had to read or references to be followed up, then we photocopied them and talked about them to each other'

'Mine (colleagues) were wonderful, especially ... E was invaluable... she was very helpful for a lot of my work and she also proof read for me ...'

' ... they were very interested. I mean, I often used to use the odd colleague to read up my assignments and things like that and say "What do you think?" They were quite helpful.'

26 Well, I must say, I was in a lovely position because we have got a team of speech therapists and we have a small team of teachers but everybody's very dedicated to their work, so if anybody heard of what it was about (an assignment) you know they definitely would rally round. If they'd read anything they would say - like - this would be quite interesting. So that was good and now we've noticed ... with one person in the school going further (transferring to MEd) she had to give a very short talk for about five minutes on what she was actually doing at the moment, and it was because others wanted to know if there was anything they ever came across they could help her.

Suggestions were made that there was an impact in turn on colleagues:

'Quite a lot of my materials on the course ... the adviser was very interested in the material. So I passed on as much as I could.'

... and then because I was working with this child (for an assignment) the class teacher began to sort of try and find out why I was interested in the child, ... if they asked me questions, of course I answered them

'I go back to those(materials) often, you know, to ... P my colleague'll say find out about this, ... about a child. "I think, I've got something somewhere, I'll go and dig it out" It's been very helpful to me.

One appeared to have influenced a colleague so that

9 *'my speech therapist colleague has agreed to carry out more school-based observations'*

Although students had not been explicitly prepared to involve their colleagues, it became apparent that, through activities and assignments and, perhaps because of the visibility of course materials in their schools, it was an important element. In turn, it seemed as though distance learning could also influence those who were not enrolled as students but who had access to the course, via a student. The view of the course as an interactive system was again highlighted and it was important to consider how the elements interacted in a teacher's work system. The possibility that change in an individual, for whatever reason, would affect others around them should be examined further and possibly become an area for exploration by the students on the course. If they could be prepared beforehand to involve their colleagues, then the student might feel better supported during their studies and the colleagues might feel that they too were benefitting. Employers who funded students might be particularly attracted to the idea of group benefit when funding an individual.

- 11 *the assessment and recording one (assignment) was really useful.*
CM *Why was that particularly useful?*
11 *I think because we had to think about how we did it together and in fact although we thought we were working very closely - ... we weren't actually, either recording together in a sort of format that we shared. We weren't planning together in that sort of way and in a shared format, which again we did then, ... we actually began to use each other to assess in the situation we found ourselves*

Some respondents believed that their communication and effectiveness with other professional colleagues was enhanced

- 11 *'I understand a good deal better what my speech-language therapist partner is about and how I can support her work whilst communicating areas of my work which she can become involved in'*
13 *The course helped to break down barriers between the knowledge 'owned' by speech therapists and teachers. It showed that there was a lot of shared ground between the two...'*
20 *'I feel more skilled at knowing when and how to involve other professions and more informed to help families and coordinate resources!'*

- 27 *'confidence when discussing children with speech therapists and educational psychologists is much greater because of knowledge gained'.*

Another said that

- 16 *'as a unit we have worked through various issues raised by the course'*

This included

'looking carefully at liaison'.

When asked, after completion of the course, if there had been specific changes in practice in their work setting some respondents particularly cited collaboration with colleagues

- 23 *'I do more in-class support work ... there has been increased collaboration with colleagues in school ... more information is given to others - parents professionals'*

For another respondent

- 20 *'the style of team meetings has changed' to the extent that 'more meaningful dialogue is possible between teachers, speech therapists, learning support assistants and associated professionals'*

One teacher itemised the assignments from the course and how each had influenced her work context, one assignment had caused them to see

- 11 *'how we could watch each other at work and record and how we could bring our own expertise to bear on what we recorded'*

In addition to the general responses on collaboration, there were a number of specific indications that for some, the relationship with the speech-language therapist or educational psychologist had changed.

- 8 *'I am working in a team with speech and language therapists much more closely than has previously been possible'*

21 *'better team work between teacher, speech-language therapist and educational psychologist'*

25 *'There is much more of an equal and complementary relationship between myself and speech language therapist. We frequently come to similar conclusions in our reports but coming from different directions'*

Work with parents was also said to have particularly changed in some cases

13 *'we have started to prepare materials to inform parents about the main aspects of the units work'*

21 *'more aware of parental feelings and encourage them to voice them'*

Systems thinking and professional development

Bateson suggested that

'If a man (sic) achieves or suffers change in premises which are deeply embedded in his mind, he will surely find that the results of that change will ramify throughout his whole universe' (Bateson, 1973 p306).

If we believe in the potential for change in an individual through a professional development course, a next step might be to consider the impact the change could have on a system. The systemic thinking activity described in Chapter 4 was introduced to the third cohort of students early in their second year, at the summer residential component.

There were 28 teachers in the group. 17 handed in papers following the activity (60.7%). In the evaluation of the summer residential component, also completed by 17 members of the group (not necessarily the same 17), it was clear that several of the teachers had not felt this to be a useful activity. Two teachers wrote that they did not wish to participate in research; seven said they would have preferred to have heard more about systemic approaches to family therapy, rather than relate it to their own workplace.

Three teachers suggested that the activity would be more relevant some time after completion of the course.

'I feel it would be easier to complete this satisfactorily having completed the course and hopefully had time to reflect on my practice and built upon what I have learned'.

The colleague who had led the session reported afterwards that she had not felt that it had gone well, she had felt some hostility from the group and that it was one of the most difficult sessions she had run.

Each of the 17 who returned the activity sheets had completed an extensive and complex 'map' of their work relationships. Although some had failed to identify themselves in the diagram, others represented themselves in networks of a wide range of people, inside and outside of the education system.

As the response to the activity was considered low (60.7%), a slightly modified version (see Chapter 4) was sent out to the second cohort of teachers who had completed the course in April 1993. 15 completed sheets were returned from a total of 25 sent out, a similar 60% response to those who had undertaken the activity 'live'.

The work settings varied with examples of day and residential special schools, units within primary and middle schools and there were examples of teachers supporting pupils in several different schools, including one who went to seven schools. Opportunities for colleagues to be affected would be different in each case. The teachers described relating to a range of colleagues including other teachers in a language unit, a special or a mainstream school; non-teaching assistants, described variously as learning support assistants, classroom assistants, special support staff or nursery nurses; speech and language therapists (SaLTs) and assistants; care staff and lunchtime supervisors; occupational and physiotherapists; educational and clinical psychologists; medical officers; headteachers or principals.

In presenting the data in a table, decisions were made about the job titles of colleagues. For example, some respondents cited their fellow-teacher in the unit where they worked and others cited other specialist support teachers or other teachers in their special school. These are all included in the category 'other SEN teachers'. Staff called 'early years' teachers are included together with 'nursery teachers'. 'Support ass't' includes colleagues described as 'learning support assistant', 'special support assistant' and 'nursery nurse' or 'NNEB'. No distinction has been made when a respondent has cited colleagues in the plural, for example 'mainstream teachers', compared with the citing of a single colleague in that category.

The table below shows the colleagues cited by the respondents to have been most positively affected by the teacher doing the course. The group undertaking the activity at the summer school is identified as 'A'. The group completing the activity by post is identified as 'B'. The numbers along the top represent the individual teachers responding to the activity.

Table 8.1 Colleagues positively affected - Group A

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Other sen teacher	*							*			*				*		
H/t /principal	**		*	*													
Deputy H/t			*														
Sen coordinator	*																
Support ass't						*		*	*	*		*			*		
Mainstream teach's							*				*						
SaLT		*	*	*	*	*	*	**		*	*	*		*	*	*	*
Parents												*					
Ch of gov'ns			*														
Care staff																	
Early yrs /nurs'y tchs																	
Clin. psych.																	

1**cites head teachers of two schools

8 ** cites SaLT and SaLT assistant

Table 8.2 Colleagues positively affected - Group B

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Other sen teacher	*	*		*			*	*	*		*						
H/t /principal													*	*			
Deputy H/t														*			
Sen coordinator																	
Support ass't			*	*	*		*		*					*			
Mainstream teach's	*			*	*		*							*			
SaLT			*				*		*			*	*	*	*		
Parents																	
Ch of gov'ns																	
Care staff		*							*								
Early yrs /nurs'y tchs				*						*							
Clin. psych.															*		

The responses are considered across the two groups and represent a total of 32 course members out of a possible total of 53 (60%). Two respondents (13A and 6B) cite nobody as having been positively affected. Others, for example respondents 3A; 8A; 14B, 7B, 3B suggest that four or five colleagues were affected in this way. Speech-language therapists, who are likely to be frequent members of the systems in work with pupils with speech and language difficulties are cited 21 times. Learning support staff are cited 13 times and teacher-colleagues in the mainstream classes are cited 8 times. Others, who are probably less frequently members of the group, are cited less, for example, clinical psychologist, chair of the governing body. They inevitably reflect the particular characteristics of that system and the networks within it. Parents are cited once.

The teachers were next asked to say how their colleague(s) had been positively affected.

Example 14B

This teacher described her work setting as a 10-place language unit attached to a 400-roll primary school. In addition to coordinating the unit, she was also the special educational needs coordinator for the whole school. The 5 colleagues had been positively affected by the course because

'more information is available on the needs of the children, particularly speech and language'.

Example 7B

This teacher worked in a language unit in a mainstream first and middle school with 16 full-time pupils; 6 part-time pupils integrated in the mainstream school with two full-time special support assistants. Her colleagues had been positively affected as follows:

Mainstream staff by

'passing on of information gathered from the course, directly and indirectly concerning management of children'

Support assistants by

'My increased confidence in using other adults in the classroom effectively'

Other unit teacher by

'passing on information with regard to specific difficulties and recent research'

Speech therapist by

'my better understanding of her background, expertise and assessment'

Example 12A

Worked in a junior-level unit. The positive effects were because

'my increased knowledge has increased shared decisions with the speech-language therapist. Classroom assistants and parents have been able to get more information.'

Speech-language therapists were most frequently cited to have been positively affected.

A number of the teachers' comments suggest that the course enabled them to work more effectively with the therapists. The words 'joint' and 'shared' were used and there appeared to have been enhanced mutual understanding which had led to improved collaboration:

'we now plan and work out joint aims for the children. We have established a development plan for the centre'

'better professional working relationship. More joint curriculum planning considering whole child and awareness of all problems. Regular reviews'

'the speech therapists and I can understand what each other is saying more often and can plan and work more closely together'.

Many teachers in special education are likely to have daily working relationships with support assistants. Some of the teachers saw that their participation in the course had increased their own competence which had affected these colleagues :

'they have developed their own knowledge through my learning'

'helping to train the classroom assistant alongside the therapist to work with the children'.

'I am more able to organise the NNEB to carry out more appropriate tasks and explain why I need tasks completed in a certain way'.

Teachers in language units will often liaise with mainstream class teachers when helping unit pupils to integrate into their classes. Respondents reported there had been some positive effects on these relationships:

'(I) have been able to talk to mainstream colleagues in formal staff meetings with increased confidence about problems involving unit pupils'

A number of the responses suggested that the teachers thought their colleagues perceived them to be either more confident, more competent, or both:

Head teacher's view:

'As far as I can tell, the speech and language difficulties course at Birmingham seems to be

...improving the confidence and ability of this teacher to address the problems of special needs in this school'

A fellow unit teacher

'As far as I can tell, the speech and language difficulties course at Birmingham seems to be

... a relevant and informative course. It has been very useful in giving confidence to modify and differentiate national curriculum demands for pupils' individual needs

A speech therapist

Since (name) started the course s/he's

...able to discuss children with far greater confidence

A head teacher:

Since (name) started the course s/he's

... become familiar with testing procedures. Has demonstrated an awareness of the individuality of each child's particular problem. Has attempted to improve the learning skills of various children by matching the activity, task, assessment procedures to the child. Has attempted to liaise with class teachers'

A fellow teacher

Since (name) started the course s/he's

... had more confidence and made considerable changes in practice - planning, teaching, recording.

Classroom assistants' views:

As far as I can tell, the speech and language difficulties course at Birmingham seems to be

...giving her more strategies to work with the children

Since (name) started the course s/he's

... given me more ideas to work with the children

As far as I'm concerned the BEST things about her/him doing the course are

...the ideas and information she can bring back and share with us

Reference to speech-language therapists arose in this section, suggesting engagement at the level of professional discussion.

As far as I'm concerned the WORST things about her/him doing the course are

...asking for details of obscure tests, difficult to administer assessments and more of my time !

Similarly

the questions I have to answer!

(the exclamation marks following both of these suggest that the comments were not negatively intended)

As far as I'm concerned the BEST things about her/him doing the course are

...that I can discuss things using speech therapy terminology and she is able to understand this'

One example suggested that the teacher had now stepped in to the therapist's role in some respects. She suggested that a teacher-colleague would say:

Since (name) started the course s/he's

... can provide me with some advice that I may have sought from the speech therapist in the past.

Even though these colleagues were said to have been positively affected, the impact on a system when one member is involved in something new is not all useful and there is evident pressure or anxiety for some members. It may take some time for the system to adjust to the changes. Although distance education is attractive to employers, who may

see it as a way of developing staff with no disruption caused by study leave or the need to find alternative staff, colleagues may have a different view:

As far as I'm concerned the WORST things about her/him doing the course are

... the fact that no allowance was made for study leave. Study time was given at our expense and that of the children. She was very difficult to work with when working on an assignment- did not have her mind on the job - tired etc.

Another class teacher's view:

As far as I'm concerned the WORST things about her/him doing the course are

...that she can be over-enthusiastic about new ideas and I simply can't find time to implement them without losing other aspects of the curriculum

As far as I'm concerned the WORST things about her/him having done the course *...some of the things I helped with were quite time-consuming.*

Negative effects

With particular reference to professional development activities in schools,

'One aspect of a systemic approach is that it leads us to consider how change in one part of a school will affect other parts...' (Osborne 1994 p34).

Although positive changes from these activities is desirable, there are possibilities that participating students may experience some difficulties through resistance from colleagues. Osborne suggests that because of a school's systemic nature,

'Efforts to maintain equilibrium are important to the school's stability over time and one way of effecting this could be for other staff to ignore or treat with scorn the attempts at change of the teacher concerned ' (p34)

This needs to be taken into account when evaluating effects of development activities.

In the same activity, the teachers were asked to give examples of colleagues who had been negatively affected by them doing the course and to say how they had been affected.

Table 8.3 Colleagues negatively affected - Group A

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Other sen teacher				*													
H/t /principal																	
Deputy H/t														*			
Sen coordinator					*												
Support ass't										*							
Mainstream teach's	*						*				*	*	*				
SaLT			*							*						*	
Parents																	
Ch of gov'ns																	
Care staff																	
Early yrs /nurs'y tchs																	
Clin. psych.																	

Table 8.4 Colleagues negatively affected - Group B

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Other sen teacher									*						*		
H/t /principal																	
Deputy H/t				*							*						
Sen coordinator																	
Support ass't						*			*								
Mainstream teach's																	
SaLT				*					*								
Parents																	
Ch of gov'ns																	
Care staff									*								
Early yrs /nurs'y tchs					*												
Clin. psych.																	

A striking feature of the comments on the way colleagues were negatively affected is the use of the word 'threatened'. 22 examples are cited of colleagues being negatively affected and in 9 cases, the reason is given that they were in some way threatened by their colleague undertaking the course. Three other teachers said that their colleagues were 'jealous', 'resented' or had a 'negative attitude' to the course.

The following are typical of these views :

A head of learning support

'feels threatened by my specialist knowledge which she doesn't have'

A deputy head teacher was

'threatened by further qualification and knowledge'

A speech and language therapist

'felt threatened by my understanding of her work'

All of the other negative effects were said to be due to the extra pressure and loss of time for colleagues as a result of the course. In the case of teacher 9 in Group B, the same colleagues were said to have been positively and negatively affected because

'they have had to tolerate a team member who has not had her job uppermost in her mind three times a year ie. when assignments were due. They have had to increase their workload during my periods of study leave and summer school'.

And in a similar vein, ancillary assistants were said to

'suffer from the fact that I am so busy and preoccupied'.

There is something paradoxical in these statements as the assignments are designed to impact on practice and should therefore be experienced positively. However, the process of writing about their practice for assessment for the course appears to present an additional burden.

One teacher presented her mainstream colleague as saying:

Since (name) started the course s/he's

... become more assertive and keen. She wants to be in on what I'm doing with the children she sees

As far as I'm concerned the WORST things about her/him doing the course are
...that she keeps asking me about children and I haven't time in my break time to speak to her. I feel threatened by her eagerness.

The number of negative responses is small compared with the positive and all responses, positive and negative, have to be considered as 'in the minds of the teachers'. Remembering that this activity presents the the teachers' comments on how they imagine their colleagues' reactions, it was projected that a speech-language therapist would say that ... the course at Birmingham seems to be

...teaching classroom teachers about speech therapy practice.

Since starting the course s/he

... talks as though she were a speech therapist

The worst things were that

... she has started to use terms such as 'glottal stop', 'phonology problems', 'dyspraxia' which are all speech therapists' terminology'.

As far as I'm concerned the WORST things about her/him doing the course are
...she questions my judgement and makes me feel unsure of my own position. She can't stick to education any more.

Where there are perceived negative effects, the therapists are presented as persisting in their 'ownership' of work in speech and language difficulties. They seem to have difficulty in accepting looser boundaries between the work of different professionals and they seem not to wish for better collaboration and partnership with teachers but to maintain their 'expert' position. An alternative interpretation however would suggest that the course participants themselves have a firm idea of what is 'speech therapists' knowledge' and are perhaps having some difficulty in taking the responsibility for their newly acquired knowledge.

Distance learning materials and colleagues

An important element of a distance learning course is the materials sent to students for study, mainly in the form of books and recordings. These have the potential to make the course highly visible in a student's workplace. If they choose to, they will show these to their colleagues and perhaps share them with them. Some of the teachers provided examples of sharing the materials with colleagues

- 3 *The materials, I found have been really good and I have often used them ... when the peripatetic teacher in that area isn't that experienced in that aspect. So I have often gone back and used things that I have had from the course to help me in those situations.*
- 18 *Quite a lot of my materials on the course you'd be interested to know that the adviser for early years was very interested in the material. So again I passed on as much as I could.*
- 17 *I showed the speech and language therapist the one about children with language disorders and also some of the books that were suggested, and we actually went out and bought, ... Both of those on child language disabilities, those have been useful and the speech and language therapist bought a copy as well. It was good to have the latest research.*
- 26 *I know if I ever come across a problem I have a set of books on it*
CM *that's an advantage of distance-learning, isn't it, that you have materials there?*
- 26 *Yes, excellent to have that. ... we have library of materials that people would gather and the modules would be there for anybody who would want to look at them*

The course materials provide a resource for staff and course participants who, even before completing the course, were expected to provide support for their colleagues.

- 18 *... if they asked me questions, of course I answered them but I didn't want to identify language and speech children for them you know. When they asked me questions I felt that was a better approach. It's important not to deskill the class teacher and to ascertain how ready they are to be helped.*

Summary

This chapter suggests that valuable information can be obtained by evaluating the course from a different perspective. Earlier chapters have examined aspects of the course specifically from the point of view of the teachers who were students. However, when asked to look at the course through the eyes of their colleagues, there were suggestions that the course had a wider impact. The outcomes of the activities presented in this chapter endorse the view that professional development of this nature can not be seen in a vacuum. For many of the participants, the course played an active part in their working lives. Perhaps because they already had positive working relationships with colleagues, many students were able to use colleagues' support for their learning in the course. Conversely, their colleagues often gained from their participation in activities arising from the course. However, colleagues' good will was also put to the test at times when the distance learning student was under pressure from the course.

The relationship between teachers and speech and language therapists within this system is of particular interest. Many of the teachers perceived positive outcomes for their relationships with therapists as a result of undertaking the course. There were, however, suggestions in some cases that the boundaries of areas of work might be threatened by the teachers' changed knowledge and understanding of speech and language difficulties. It is not clear whether the threat was real for the therapists or perceived by the teachers but there are implications for the roles of both when one group undertakes professional development.

CHAPTER 9: THREE CASE STUDIES

Introduction

In this chapter three case studies are presented in order to pursue still further some of the themes which had emerged from the evaluation study. In particular, the aim was to take a view of the course from yet another angle and to explore whether more general lessons could be learned about the course and the way 'successful' students reacted to it. The research presented so far has raised a number of issues and generated hypotheses about processes relevant to distance education for professional development in speech and language difficulties. There was a strong impression that teachers experienced stress and pressure from the workload of the course. However, these rather negative experiences were tempered by the value teachers saw in the impact of the course on their practice. Additionally, in the last chapter, there were many suggestions that the course became closely integrated with the work of groups of colleagues which raised questions about the way students learned and how others were involved in their course activities. Not only the individual student but other practitioners, including speech and language therapists, were reported to be affected by the distance education course. These practitioners also played an important part in supporting and helping the student through the course. Participation in a course by distance education appeared to have the potential to change practice of individuals and groups of practitioners.

First, the rationale for the selection of the three cases is given, followed by the questions they were asked in interviews. Extracts from the case study interviews presented here allows more detailed probing of salient themes of the research and contributes to the cross-checking of views which is characteristic of attempts to triangulate evidence in research (Miles and Huberman, 1984).

The teachers

The 'cases' are teachers, two from the first cohort and one from the second. Each had continued contact with the University since completing the basic modules as they were amongst the teachers who chose to go on to complete masters dissertations. They appeared to have a very particular commitment to their work and a very positive and continuing involvement with the course. All three were appointed as tutors to the distance education course. In the conventional academic sense, they were amongst those who had 'done well' on the course. Their professional lives had changed since undertaking the course and each appeared to have achieved tangible outcomes for themselves and for the wider community working in the field of speech and language difficulties.

Each of these teachers agreed to be interviewed face-to-face. Prior to this they were asked to write down factual information about their present post - the setting; responsibilities; the key relationships they had there; how long they had been there, together with a brief outline of previous posts. They were also asked to give thought to the following before the interview:

Which people were most involved when you did the course?

How were they involved?

What would they have said about you when you were doing the course?

Are there any continuing effects on these or other relationships since you finished the course?

Additionally, do you think there have been any changes in you since completing the course?

What do you see as the main outcomes of the course, for you?

The interviews, which each lasted approximately forty five minutes, were recorded and transcribed. They were therefore longer and more detailed than the telephone interviews and focused more specifically on the role of other people in the teachers' course. The

questions were also directly related to suggestions made in the data from the systemic thinking activities (Chapter 8) that distance education had affected colleagues. The transcriptions were sent to the interviewees for verification and modification.

Fran

Fran has been the Language Unit Coordinator for the infant and junior language units in a primary school for seven and a half years. She teaches in the infants' unit. Previous posts were in primary schools with the particular role of English Coordinator in one junior department. She has also been an advisory teacher on specific learning difficulties and immediately before her present post, was a part-time support teacher for individual children with speech and language difficulties. In her present school she has special responsibility for the library, organising the school bookshop, book weeks and 'all issues to do with books'. She is a member of the school's senior management team and the coordinator for infant special educational needs.

She listed the following people as having key relationships with her at work: speech and language therapist; educational psychologist; non-teaching assistant; head teacher; colleagues in the junior language unit.

Since completing the masters degree, she has become a tutor to the speech and language difficulties course and has decided to train as an educational psychologist. To this end she was undertaking the Open University course which leads to recognition by the British Psychological Society. In 1994 she was invited her to join a working group on liaison between speech and language therapists and teachers, for the College of Speech and Language Therapists. She had completed a project on this during the course. One outcome of the group was the publication of a jointly authored article.

Mary

Mary is one of two language unit teachers and the Coordinator for Language for ages 4 to 7 in her mainstream school. She has held the post for seven years and since 1968 has taught in a secondary school, a residential school and as a part-time literacy teacher in

adult education. Main responsibilities are in the language unit and liaison work for integration of unit pupils into mainstream classes.

She listed the following people as having key relationships with her: the special support assistant (SSA); speech and language therapist; mainstream colleagues; the special educational needs coordinator; other staff in the unit; the head teacher.

Following completion of her project in the course, an edited version was published in a journal. She was awarded a scholarship to visit facilities for pupils with language difficulties in the USA. Mary came to the interview with written notes based on the questions she had been asked to think about.

Helen

Helen has been the Teacher-in-Charge of a language resource base for six years and more recently became Team Leader for the service for children with speech and language disorders in the LEA. Since 1973 she has worked in infant, junior and nursery school posts. Responsibilities in addition to teaching are concerned with staffing and management of the service and the maintenance of communication between different levels of the service.

She listed the following people as having key relationships with her: within the team, the teachers, learning support assistants, speech and language therapist and secretary; outside of the team, the Head of Service and other professional agencies.

Following her masters degree, Helen registered for a research degree in the University, for which she was awarded a Fellowship. She has had a paper accepted for publication in a research journal. She now acts as a tutor to the course.

Distance education as stress

Surprisingly, none of these three women gave the impression that the course had been unduly stressful. Indeed, all three gave the impression that it had been a positive and enjoyable experience. Mary, for example, suggested that although involving a heavy workload, the course had been the equivalent of a hobby:

If I think about myself - I'm not a hobbies type person. I'd love to be but this I've really kept up and loved doing. I think I've regarded it as my relaxation.

She did not think that she had had to sacrifice very much for the course and, indeed, because of the attitude of family members, there had been advantages

I think he (her husband) sees it as something quite legitimate that I'm spending my time doing because I enjoy it. ... it's something else we've been through together. In a marriage you have these shared experiences - this is definitely one. ... he's definitely behind me - part of it

With my older son - we certainly had a fellow feeling, which was lovely - he was just starting university. It's given me insight and I've been able to help him in certain ways.

Helen said that she was '*excited by it*' and similarly put the course into the 'hobby' category

Don (husband) always said not to worry about the expense of buying books - if I'd taken up a new hobby it would have meant spending out on equipment etc.

This positive impression was given particular emphasis when, during the interview with Fran, her psychologist-colleague entered the room, unplanned. Fran asked him what he thought about her doing the course

Bill *You were incredibly relaxed about it - You didn't seem to be under great pressure - you appeared to be enjoying it - is that how it was?*

Fran *Yes it was - I enjoyed it - but it was my favourite thing to be doing - you know - of the things I had to do it was the thing I wanted to do most.*

She later said

I've done jobs where work and not work are very clearly demarcated - but not this - it's just so interesting - whatever you pick up and read

Even when describing some adjustments to their social networks, none of these three teachers appeared to see negative implications

Fran *Some friends dropped off the scene during the time - quite simply because I didn't have the time for socialising but those who stayed with me were close friends anyway*

Helen *My old friends were involved in that I didn't have as much time for them. ... inevitably lost touch with a few but I've got to know people in a new way. The people who liked me were sure I'd be successful.*

The involvement of others with the course

None of the three women hesitated in identifying people involved when they undertook the course and all placed great emphasis on the part that family members had played. In the questionnaires and interviews earlier with the larger groups, few respondents had mentioned family members although this may have been related to the way the questions were asked.

Family members appeared to accept course activities and apparently willingly adjusted to involvement with the course.

Fran *... my family were heavily involved. My mother had been living with us for a while after my father died - and when I got involved with the course she kind of took over a lot more - in fact she's never gone back. She's much more involved day-to-day - I think in a way it led me to think I could do more. Also my husband took over a great deal ... My daughters - it was quite interesting really - I worried about them for the whole four years - how much I was depriving them - and when I finished the course we had a celebration and I said again to them - thanked them for all their support - and they had no idea it was different - it was what they were used to - they didn't know what I was talking about really.*

Helen too, talked about some adjustments in the organisation of the family

I felt they were neglected at first but it was a good thing- perhaps a healthy neglect - My status in the family changed. I managed to become quite selfish. I became far more single minded about my work, having my own space. ... I can remember comments about what a lot we've learned since starting the course. They were probably bored because I was so excited. I couldn't stop talking about it, especially at first.

C *they didn't object did they?*

H *Oh no -they were very supportive actually ...*

I'd like to think it was a good role model especially for the girls to see that I'd stayed at home while they were babies and that was fine ... It's good for them to see that you can combine family and career. ...

It's given us all a chance to grow as a family because it's given me a chance and it's altered the balance. We were looking to make changes ... it's led to us doing an almost total swop now.

Similarly, Mary remembered adjustments to their family life as she believed she had less time for her children. There was also very real engagement with the course from her husband who, she reported, checked her assignments and discussed them with her.

Colleagues

Alongside family members, it was also clear that the colleagues of these three teachers had played an important part in supporting them through the course.

someone shared something with you - helped you through it. They have a little bit of ownership of it because they've got a commitment to you. (Mary)

Fran named the educational psychologist and speech-language therapist, describing them as '*partners*' who readily engaged in activities and

were very willing to have a go at changing the way that they worked - to see if we could find a better way. And I shared all my reading with them ...

They were an enormous encouragement - they'd always ask how it was going ... If anything new and a bit different came along they'd be willing to share it.

It was clear that for her, the course entered into a set of well-developed professional relationships where people were already used to working together and were open to new ideas which they would take on collaboratively. Fran was conscious of a working process in which discussion and exchange played an important part

it made our professional exchanges different ... the conversations we were having were based on things I was reading ... in fact we've not moved forward in the way we did during that time since

Overall, Fran gave an impression of working in a stimulating setting where people actively promoted and supported each others' learning. She reported that overall, through the course, she had developed

An understanding of our particular team - how we best work together and the division of labour which is most effective ... benefitting the children ...the experiential nature of the course meant that there was always something to try out which was very stimulating

Mary presented a similar list of people who engaged with her work for the course. She expressed the involvement of her colleagues as a two-way process with benefits on each side

The speech and language therapist ... a great help to me

The SSA - the general support she gave me - for example if I had a tutorial we'd plan so that I could leave on time - I can't overestimate the support she's given me in that way - and lots of enthusiasm - pleased when I got a good grade - and in the activities - anything I threw at her she'd have a go at. Observation - she developed really good observation skills - which we still use. I heard her telling another SSA how to do an observation in a PE lesson the other day - I thought that's really good.

Mainstream colleagues - the involvement there would be discussion - sharing ideas - things I'd been asked to do in the course. Maggie - we would discuss management of our children and management of the children that she worked with

Helen added to her colleagues, the parents of pupils

I went to my families for material too - they sent me in tapes of their children talking at home to analyse and I went to some of my families to do some of the activities in the texts

However, not all of the involvement was seen to be positive. Helen was one of the teachers who had been allowed study time by her employer and this led to some ambivalence

The other side of it is the resentment from work which perceived me as away from where I should be - putting my energy into something selfish not directly related to my class. It does inevitably take time and attention and sometimes you're not as on top of your school work as you should be but that's very short term. ... There is some stress in it and some jealousy really It does cause disruption to have a teacher away one day a week.

Although she seemed to believe that positive effects outweighed negative, Helen's comments resonated with some from the group of students who suggested that colleagues suffered from additional workload and course activities caused tension:

... if you weren't there one day you were perceived as slacking - and not pulling your weight - and the fact that it was a supply teacher was disruptive

CM *ah yes, that was disruptive*

H *Yes, initially ... if someone was doing the course now I could put a good supply teacher in and you could work on the positive side of that for the children. ... use the strengths of that adult and balance the weakness of that adult - but I know certainly when I started it was very disruptive and the class would actually fall apart and misbehave - not be getting on like they should and it would annoy everybody and also when you're not there and you're not there to take messages or see things through ...*

... some of the assignments we did very much needed some help - you were needing people's time.

In the main though, colleagues were willing participants and for Mary, there were some frustrations in not being as influential on her closest colleague as she might have wished:

... I haven't fed nearly as much back to that other classroom and to Cath (her immediate colleague) as I would have hoped ... I would have liked to have gone through the modules with her - certainly the course texts and I have passed her things ...

C *She looked at the books did she?*

M *I passed them on to her but up until fairly recently I was still using them - I was certainly using them for my masters - they're a bit like a security blanket - but definitely lots of things I've really pushed at them - like models of management and groups and teams - I've photocopied them and said you must look at this. But not as much as I would have hoped.*

Perhaps surprisingly, only one of the three teachers interviewed talked about the tutorial group. Helen linked this with the feeling that her field of study was special

The group - the quality was very good ... people were involved directly as support - a place to bounce ideas about - knock ideas off each other. ... it is so peculiar to be a speech and language teacher - not many people understand it or want to listen but we can listen to each other.

Although in the earlier evaluations, there was evidence that the tutorial groups had an important function, for some students they may have been less significant than a close-knit work group. However, there were no suggestions that Fran and Mary did not appreciate their tutorials.

Distance education and practice

The relevance of the course to practice was an important theme in the earlier evaluations, to the extent that it lends support to a hypothesis that distance education can be effective for professional development in this field. The three teachers interviewed gave a number of instances of changes to their practice. Although no questions directly asked about speech and language therapists, these were frequently linked with aspects of the speech and language therapist's work.

Fran identified a number of developments in her role as a practitioner saying firstly that '*everything impacted on the children*' because of a general increase in knowledge and understanding. She was

better able to plan both for the short and long term - curriculum review based on the course

and ... *found a wide variety of ways of recording which were purposeful*

developed much more acute observation skills of children - not just speech and language but the whole thing - child study stood me in good stead and child development module

... with the speech and language therapist to talk to - found that we both grew and developed in a close teaching/therapy relationship in which we were speaking the same language - for the children this provided a more cohesive approach.

Mary appeared to be a teacher who was very aware of her own approach to practice. The course had apparently given her opportunities to examine these processes and develop them further. She described herself as a more sceptical observer of the school system but that her observation and record-keeping were '*more finely tuned now*'. She had always been a 'planner'

... for twenty odd years and I still do look very carefully at how I plan things but I think the course emphasised something else for me - this idea of reflecting on what you've done ...

C *but you say you were doing that anyway*

M *I wouldn't say the reflecting part - the preparation yes ... I suppose when I came on the course at a later stage of my life - the emphasis I took very much was 'look at what you actually do'. ... when you asked us to teach a lesson - tear it apart and teach it again.*

From many of the things said, it was apparent that Mary was a highly structured, systematic and thoughtful practitioner, and that this style of working seemed to be very compatible with the approach of the course.

... the pieces of work I did for the project and dissertation opened up for me how important it was that we prepared children who were going to integrate ... definitely the one child that went into mainstream last year, the mainstream staff noticed that there was an improvement. I've made it more streamlined - I've done an integration pack ... It's all colour coded - the unit colour's yellow and everything's handed out on yellow paper - that's the course, definitely the course - that is dealing with the children - the support of children in integration - dealing with planning -

Mary described a very positive working relationship she had developed over time with the speech therapist, and she believed that this colleague saw her '*change a great deal*' and had seen her speak with much more confidence and assurance in meetings. She believed that the course

' made it easier for her (the therapist) to work with me - I was able to understand more what she was talking about

She then suggested that because of her positive relationship with this therapist and as a result of the course, she was able to steer a useful working relationship with a new therapist who came to the unit:

... the need for the therapy to follow whatever was going on in the classroom, that the therapy wasn't something that happened in a clinic ... So I think in many ways the therapist is drawn in as a result of the course - because I was willing for that to happen, and wanted to make it happen

Overall Mary summarised the links between the course and her practice as

I think each child I chose to study had an improvement.

In a similar way to the other two, Helen expressed a generalised influence from the course work saying that

'all I learnt from the course has made me different'.

She reported changes to her planning and preparation for pupils and in her liaison with colleagues. She said that she was also better able to work with parents because her enhanced understanding meant that she could *'explain it to other people'*. She was also required to provide inservice work now for other teachers:

I know it's at one remove but that's helping children. If you teach one child you teach one child but if you teach one teacher you're teaching an infinite number of children.

Helen was asked in the interview whether, if asked, the children would notice differences in the way she now worked. She responded that the children were getting

better work - better quality of work - more sensitive work They're getting far more accurate assessment, preparation, delivery, evaluation of work. They're getting more exciting ideas put into practice from me getting ideas from other people

and that the evidence was

more children are going back to mainstream

As Mary had done, Helen believed that assignments for the course had been able to impact directly on practice. Children who had been used as examples '*got a real in-depth analysis*' and she particularly cited the curriculum planning assignment

... the whole class had the most superb summer term because I was using them for that curriculum one - it's cruel in a way because you should be doing it anyway but they do get better treatment when you are using them as a real in-depth example ... they also get the benefit of that once you know how to do that you go on doing it.

Her comments resonated with some of the earlier feedback and she endorsed the curriculum module as a template for curriculum planning

I mean you couldn't go on actually planning and delivering and recording a lesson session in the depth I did it for that assignment ... there aren't enough hours in the day ... if you start with a high standard - even if you drop as real life gets the better of you - you must still be performing better than if you'd never pulled your socks up that high in the first place - even when you start to slip - you're still doing a better job and at least you've got it in your mind ... I think what's in your mind does come out in what you're doing

Continuing impact

Although it was suggested that coursework had had immediate effects on pupils and colleagues, the three teachers also gave indications that there were longer-term effects.

Helen was clear in her conviction that changes to her practice were continuing. Her unit had developed written policies on curriculum and language

'informed by both what we learned and how we learned to talk with each other, from the course'

'Hard evidence' would be seen, she said, in the difference in the annual reviews of children in 1990, which were '*skimpy*' compared with now. She felt that

The essence of the course benefits is that I know what I'm talking about now. I know how to find things out. I can discuss now with administrators and doctors even - even in a child protection case conference - I would argue now with somebody about speech and language difficulty - their effect. ... I don't think people deliberately try to pull the wool over your eyes but things get

blurred don't they - unless you argue very precisely and I can certainly do that now and I couldn't before

A similar impression that they had gained confidence in stating their case and putting forward their views came from each of the three. Fran had spontaneously taken initiatives to develop activities. She had become involved in outreach work and an inset course for teachers

... if I'm in a meeting or something like that ... things that they touch on I think Oh yes, I've got a lot on that. I can do this. I can do that. I can volunteer 'cos I've already written about it. In a way the ripples are wider now than they were at the time.

The personal significance of this change seemed to be quite considerable since each of them suggested that they had previously felt some inadequacy to work in a specialist field.

Fran said

You see in this world - the world of speech and language it's a world where you have to have credibility

She felt that her academic ability had now been affirmed

I never thought I could have got to the end - to the MEd. ... even the thought of a first degree was like pie in the sky. I never thought I could have got it. I suppose that's been really really important in making me feel much better

Mary said

it has affected my standing in the school I suppose - and that takes time 'cos I wasn't equal - I wasn't in terms of knowledge of our children's difficulties - all the mystique that surrounded it -

Helen said

You're seen more as a specialist service because you've had the specialist input and parents ask ... what specialist training do you have? ... if you say well actually there isn't any, it doesn't sound terribly convincing.

Changes in self-concept were evident from these interviews, Mary said that she

'actually can see myself as a teacher-researcher now'

She described how she still followed up references and came in to the University library making copies of articles and passing them on to *'whoever I think they should be passed to'*. She did this, she said, *'because I think it makes me a better teacher'*. Similar habits persisted for Fran who found that, acting as a tutor, new papers were distributed which she continued to pass on to her therapist-colleague.

Helen mentioned the more enduring material characteristics of distance education

... even if you can't hold it all in your head you can say - I've got a book at home

and listed a number of other gains from participation in the course

... using the computer - research skills - organisational skills, library skills. It's another way of working with people and learning what people ...

and one outcome which Helen always joked about:

Driving on the motorway - I'd never done that before

Comments

Two of these teachers were from the same cohort of students but none of them knew each other, although Fran and Helen probably met at the summer residential components during their course. Nevertheless there are some notable similarities in their responses.

None of the three had difficulty in identifying people involved in their studies. In each case there were strong impressions that involvement and support of family members was important. Other students might have envied the practical help which they each reported. Helen and Mary both had husbands who were not employed outside the home and who took on domestic responsibilities. Fran's mother was an additional help to her. Each of them reported apparently easy adjustments in their family systems, although Fran and Helen both expressed anxieties about this. It seemed as though the families accommodated the new activities of the mother as a student and in various ways gave

practical support. Direct assistance with course activities was described by Helen and Mary.

Each of them also described support from colleagues at work. In the cases of Fran and Mary, this seemed to arise from teams which already worked well together. Colleagues of all three became involved in assignments and activities with clear benefits for the colleagues of Fran and Mary. Coursework seemed to act as a catalyst for their collaborative efforts. However, neither Mary or Helen felt that their most immediate colleagues were as involved as they would have hoped, nor did they benefit as much as others in their wider work group. For Helen, tensions arose when additional demands were placed on people because of her course work. She thought others perceived her study leave as 'slacking'. Mary did not think that she had done enough to influence her immediate colleague. All three of the teachers however did describe mutual benefits to themselves and to some others during the course.

The personal benefit commonly described by the teachers was the rise in confidence from their participation in the course. Each of them seems to have felt keenly the lack of a specialist qualification and perceived the field of speech and language difficulties as somehow special and different. Although having good relationships with the therapists, and in spite of having practical experience from working in the field for some time, there may have been some feelings that the therapists were more knowledgeable than the teachers. The course allowed them to experience a new status and credibility within their work group, although this may not be an actual change in the eyes of their colleagues.

Confirmation that they are able to undertake what they perceive as 'academic work' is expressed by Mary and Fran whilst Helen describes better organisational skills, computer skills and library skills. Mary and Helen explicitly see themselves now as

teacher-researchers and all three describe continued interest in reading and pursuing their interests further.

In some of the questionnaires and interviews with other students there was a feeling that the course created enormous stress and pressure, even though some of these same teachers also described positive benefits from undertaking the course. Although not specifically asked about this, none of these three teachers suggested that the course had been experienced in this way. Indeed, each spontaneously described their enjoyment of the course, seeing it more as a part of their leisure or social time rather than an arduous aspect of their work. They undertook course activities readily and chose to continue after the basic modules were completed. They describe themselves (from the perspective of others) as 'hardworking', 'organised', 'determined'. Indeed, they appear to be very aware of their personal strengths and talk willingly about them. Each appears to have become strongly and positively emotionally engaged in their study. They undertook activities such as outreach and inservice work with colleagues which extended their regular teaching duties. The enthusiasm of these teachers for their work in the field of language disability is apparent.

In spite of positive views of the tutorial arrangements from other students, only Helen talked about these in the interview. The others do not include members of their tutor group amongst those who were involved during the course, although for Fran and Mary, this may be because they would assume involvement of these people. None of the three appear to believe that tutorials are unnecessary as they all opted to become tutors. It is possible that the way in which they were asked to prepare for the interview excluded a focus on tutorials to some extent. Perhaps too, the relationships at work for Mary and Fran provided better support than contacts from the tutorial group and so reduced their importance.

These three teachers believed that they were now working in a different way and that this would affect their pupils. Each of them responded in a general way that 'everything' in the course had such an effect. More specifically, they referred to improved planning and recording and a better ability to link language with teaching and learning. For Fran and Mary, the perceived impact on pupils was partly related to more effective collaboration with colleagues, in particular, the speech and language therapist.

Summary

Many aspects of the three case studies endorse comments from earlier feedback from other students. Although handpicked as examples of successful students, the accounts of these three teachers do not differ greatly from the more general reports of changes linked with the distance education experience. Their comments support the view that this type of course can have a positive impact on teachers' knowledge, skills and understanding. Further, the teachers' reported enhanced confidence is associated with a greater feeling of competence in a field which they see as 'specialised' and having a 'mystique'. It is not clear how much this view is linked with the ways in which teachers work with speech and language therapists but discussions of models of speech and language difficulty in Chapter 2 suggests that some of these may have previously been inaccessible to teachers. Comments from the three teachers and earlier comments, in Chapter 8, suggest that the course helped the teachers to better understand therapists and their ways of working. There are implications throughout this study for better mutual understanding of the approaches of teachers and speech and language therapists.

CHAPTER 10: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study has investigated the nature and content of a new professional development course predominantly through an examination of responses from key participants. At the beginning of Chapter 4, three broad questions were posed which have driven the evaluation activities presented in Chapters 5 - 9. They were

What are the main processes in the development of the innovative approach of distance education to professional development in special education?

What are the particular implications of the processes and outcomes of this distance education course for teachers and speech and language therapists?

How can the processes be understood for further development and evaluation of similar enterprises?

The second question gained importance as the evaluation activities proceeded. There were no direct questions about speech and language therapists in the evaluation activities, yet the teachers spontaneously referred to these colleagues in many of their responses. The course has significance, not only for teachers, but for speech and language therapists, who are frequently working in close contact with them.

The research questions have been addressed through a range of activities and from different points of view. The course was planned following requests from a variety of groups and individuals with an interest in children and young people with speech and language difficulties. An investigation of the needs of practitioners in educational settings provided a starting point for the development of the course's curriculum. However, a planned course changes and develops in response to participants and to other

external and internal influences. It only partly represents an original plan and in some ways it resembles a living organism which must adapt and evolve if it is to continue a useful life. Section 2 of the thesis provided information on some of the critical features of the course on which to base decisions for further development of the programme and perhaps other, similar schemes. In Chapter 5 the formal support systems arranged for the students were examined. The importance of links with other teachers and experienced professionals was examined and the relevance of a social view of learning for professional development became evident. Chapter 6 focused on areas of course content and on the factors which seemed to be important in students' positive and negative evaluations. Linked with this, in Chapter 7, students' views of the relevance of the course to their practice was examined. In both of these chapters it was evident that student evaluations must be responded to quickly if an appropriate course, relevant to current needs, is to be offered. The possibilities of easily making changes to a small-scale distance learning course were found to be an advantage in this respect. The evaluations in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 suggested that there were implications in a student's professional development for the practice of their colleagues in schools and units. This was examined further in Chapter 8 and it was apparent that students' participation in the course was enhanced when colleagues were involved and that colleagues, in turn, experienced changes. Chapter 9 reconsidered themes emerging from Chapters 5 to 8 by exploring in some detail how these had been experienced by three selected teachers. Chapter 10 now reviews the evidence presented in Part 2, drawing it together and discussing implications for future practice. First, there is some reflection on how limitations may have been imposed on the study through the procedures adopted for course development and evaluation. Following this, the research questions are addressed by considering the processes emerging from the evaluation and their implications for this type of professional development by distance education.

Design and methods

The research reported in this thesis represents a small-scale study, although there is generally a good representation of student views. Calder (1994) suggests that the demands made on students by evaluation activities need to be addressed. In this study the requests made placed an additional burden on potential respondents and some of the activities gave rise to negative responses (see below), probably for a variety of reasons. The effort to triangulate information by seeking views in various ways from different groups increases the validity of information. Interviews were an important way of exploring student responses in further depth. and the telephone provided an important and innovative means to enable participation in interviews by more than half the first cohort of students. Very little has been written about this approach and it was necessary to explore the practicalities in some detail to ensure its validity. It appears currently to be an essential tool for research and development in distance education, although further developments in electronic communication may provide alternatives in the future. Electronic mail or video-conferencing are open to exploration for this purpose.

Methods in development of course content

The environment of special education and, in particular the education of children with speech and language difficulties was the setting from which the course was initiated. A demand had been made for professional development, suggesting there would be a 'market' and it was important to establish how the demand would be more fully articulated. A professional development activity must meet the perceived needs of the potential participants, although the final characteristics of the activity will not be solely determined by this group. The development project was a practical and rapid way of gaining a view of what the basis for a course might be. The idea of establishing somewhere to start is important as it suggests that any developments may change considerably from the original ideas and a relevant course must come from interaction with its users.

The challenge of the development project was to develop a course, in a mode not previously used. There was little experience of appropriate content for a course for teachers in the field of children's language difficulties. Provision for pupils with speech and language difficulties had increased and teachers were already working in those settings. It was reported that many of the teachers felt inadequately equipped and there were tensions between teachers and speech therapists.

A rich source of information was available from the teachers who had undertaken the course at the University of Reading. The specialist content of that course had had time to interact with at least 37 different settings in which the teachers had operated. Retrospectively, the teachers could evaluate their course in terms of its usefulness to their practice. The high response rate of that group is an indication of the motivation of the teachers and they were valuable in providing feedback on the broad aspects of a course. The larger questionnaire survey, combined with the questionnaires on the Reading course, provided an opportunity for the views of a wide group of practitioners to be sought rapidly and to be represented so that they could perhaps feel some ownership of, and control over, what would form the core curriculum of the course.

The questionnaire survey did not set out to find the final or complete answer. Action research does not have this objective. Validation of action research 'does not mean always reaching a consensus but it does imply reaching a common understanding that will act as a basis for dialogue' (McNiff, 1988 p122). The overall views from this questionnaire and from the ex-Reading students were not dissimilar and gave support to the main content areas selected in the early stages of course preparation. The findings were useful as a starting point and the present study has demonstrated that processes for further development in response to student comment can be built in to a course.

The current emphasis on competencies of teachers (Special Educational Needs Training Consortium, 1996) suggests that identification of competencies to work in the field of

speech and language difficulties might be an alternative approach to the determination of course content. However, at the start of this project, competencies had not been defined and time was not available for such an undertaking. Since the course began, a project to identify and agree broad areas of knowledge, skills and understanding for teachers in speech and language difficulties, has been undertaken (Miller and Wright, 1995). Course development can take account of these and students can be made aware of them as objectives for their learning. Future courses elsewhere can be similarly underpinned.

Main processes in developing distance education

Support for professionals as students: personal and professional aspects

Early responses of the first cohort of students provide insights into the students' personal and emotional reactions to the course and to their particular approaches to learning. The students were characterised as mid-career teachers, largely women, working in a range of settings with pupils with speech and language difficulties (see Appendix **). In these respects they resembled the majority of teachers in primary education and in special education. Few of them had undertaken relevant professional development activities. Still fewer had experience of distance education. The age profile of the teachers, whether men or women, suggests that many would have family commitments. Even if funding had been available, it is unlikely that many would have been willing or able to leave home to attend a campus-based course, either full- or part-time.

Chronic pressure was experienced in undertaking a course whilst committed to a full-time job. Most were not given study time by their employers during the working day, and adjustments therefore have to be made to teachers' personal time. The course work is most likely to be accommodated in their family and domestic schedule. It is likely that this is no small consideration. Responses represent a complex interaction of positive and negative perceptions of difficulty and workload, related to anxiety, fatigue and a range of personal, domestic and workplace circumstances. An intricate relationship between personal and professional lives is apparent. Where students responded most

positively, as in the case studies in Chapter 9, there were examples of additional domestic support and of a very positive emotional engagement with learning. These suggested that practical family support and adjustment had been helpful to them but each had also made some sacrifices in their social life.

Concurrent with the course, teachers are under enormous pressure from other sources. At the time of the study, the 1988 Education Reform Act was pervading schools in England and Wales and the new curriculum was having increasing impact. Teachers were having to accommodate high levels of innovation, with all its accompanying documentation. Many teachers were given special roles in their schools carrying additional responsibility, for example in developing curriculum policies or coordinating particular curriculum areas. The additional study required by an award-bearing course added to the burden. A distance learning course might appear to have an even greater work load because of the actual amount of materials.

The respondents would probably agree with Perry (1976) who described Open University degrees as

'the most difficult way of getting a degree yet invented by the wit of man (sic) All can be bearable if things go smoothly - when they do not the difficulties can become well-nigh insuperable. Family loyalty can be put to severe strain' (p167).

Support for professionals as students: formal arrangements

In Chapter 5, responses of students and tutors to the tutoring system were reported. The support system is an important element which links the University and the students. It potentially contributes to the transformation of course material into various outcomes of the course, facilitating a link between the subject matter and the students' social-psychological responses. Students' perception of the usefulness of tutorials has a number of angles, including their organisation and content and the interaction of members of the group and the tutor.

Distance education by definition requires a level of independence in the learner. However, as the course members in this instance were practitioners working in schools, who would be required to work as members of teams, independent learning should be tempered by social learning. There can be little value in the students learning to operate with complete autonomy since this does not reflect their everyday circumstances. The opportunity to learn with others in groups is to be encouraged in this type of course. In this study, the tutors, who are experienced practitioners, are influential. They are not the course providers, yet they have a considerable part to play in the effectiveness of the course, through the tutorials and the students' satisfaction with them.

A tutorial group functions within the larger organisational sub-system of the course. As with any group which meets together for a particular purpose, the individual members will influence, and be influenced by, each of the others. The positive aspects of group functioning emerge as an important element of this area of the work in the questionnaire extracts in Chapter 5. Many of the students suggested that exchanging information with others about practice was the most valuable aspect of tutorials. Where practitioners have posts of special responsibility, or act in an advisory capacity in any area of professional life, they may have, or take, little opportunity to share discussions with others. Their special interest may serve to isolate them from others, as may some of the characteristics of distance education. A course can provide a linking agency which enables people to meet and focus on work-related issues. Collins' (1991) research with teachers in four in-service, award-bearing courses suggested that

' teachers have as much to learn from each other as they have from the tutor. ...a large part of the in-service tutor's role must be to turn teachers towards each other, to encourage the pooling of ideas and points of view, so that teachers can see their own classroom differently and can contribute to this process with others. (p73)

Even where meetings are not possible, the potential for links through telephone, fax and electronic mail is increasing and should be encouraged. There should be concern if

classroom practitioners select distance education in order to work in isolation, without contact with others.

Increasingly, feedback endorses Holmberg's belief that empathy is an important element of distance education.

'a need to share discoveries and intellectual experiences with someone else, to exchange views and through this exchange learn confidently to work with the intellectual matter concerned' (Holmberg 1984 p60)

The evidence presented in Chapter 5 suggested that 'exchange of information between students' was high on the students' priorities for tutorial activities.

The tutorial group, in some ways like a family, can be described along a spectrum ranging from successful to dysfunctional (Burnham, 1986). A systemic perspective would say that once a group is formed, members begin to act in ways which preserve the group's homeostasis, unless particular moves are made to modify interactions. Individual members significantly affect the functioning of the tutorial group as evidenced by comments from interviews in Chapter 5. As a consequence this can impinge on others' learning and their overall response to the course. Although only six tutorial meetings a year are organised in the course, this is probably sufficient to develop and establish patterns of interactive behaviour. Other contact between group meetings may also create alliances which are then reflected in group activities. Expectations within each tutorial will then develop. For example, a particularly vociferous group member may have the effect of regularly silencing everyone else, or of stimulating them to productive discussion, depending partly on the content and style of their contribution and the overall interactive patterns of the others. The group will gradually develop this particular style of functioning.

There can be no pre-planning of the particular mix of people in a tutorial group but certain management strategies may be helpful if the course is to promote an appropriate

balance between social and autonomous learning. Tutors have increasingly been encouraged to ensure that an agenda is set for the tutorial. Further, it is important that the students are involved in the development of the tutorial plan and that the agenda and the structure accord with their needs. Interview extracts in Chapter 5 suggest that the function of tutorials must be explicit for both students and tutors. If students do not know the purpose of a tutorial or how to use it to the best advantage, they are likely to evaluate this part of the course as 'not very useful'. Some students will be more confident and assertive in their requests for help and their use of available resources. Some may attend tutorials expecting to be 'taught' and the tutor who does not fulfil this expectation may be thought unsuccessful. Past experience of teaching and learning will affect expectations which may need to be clarified frequently during the course. Conversely, a tutor who conforms to the notion of a didactic teacher will not develop in the students a feeling that they can play a part in the running of the course, or in adapting its content to meet their own needs. Training opportunities for tutors may need to focus on aspects of group management.

Content analysis and revision

In Chapters 6 and 7, evaluation of selected areas of the course content were presented. These examples suggest whether or not the curriculum was appropriate and where adjustments might be needed in response to reaction. They also suggest some general principles in the management of a course for classroom practitioners.

Students' perception of the relevance of the materials to their practice was perhaps the most important theme in assessment of the course materials. Even when students commented on excessive workload they suggested that greater demands could be made of them by some of the materials, if it helped in their understanding of pupils' difficulties, as evidenced in their response to the material on the development of literacy (Chapter 6). In contrast, their negative evaluation that the Language Description material was too much work was partly associated with their inability to see its relevance. A theoretical

approach which was new, not only to the students but also to their tutors, meant that the usual support in understanding material was unavailable. Further, although some of them did take the opportunity to enlist the help of therapist-colleagues, for many of them this was not an option because the approach was also unfamiliar to therapists. If, as the evaluation suggests, therapists are important colleagues, then material in the course should at least be consistent with therapists' practice or put the teachers in a situation where they had some confidence before asking for assistance.

In contrast, the materials focusing on language development, the nature of speech and language difficulties and language assessment were generally well received and did not appear to overburden the students with an excess of work. These aspects appeared to be no easier or more difficult than those discussed above. Each of the texts presented theoretical perspectives arguably as complex as those in the other materials, with additional reading. However, many of the comments suggested that the students saw in them an immediate relevance to their working practice and this was strongly linked with positive evaluation.

At every stage, it is clear there is a need to monitor the course in order to ensure more relevant balance of new with familiar material and theoretical with practical aspects.

Relevance to professional practice

Relevance to practice was an outstanding theme in the evaluation of the curriculum planning materials in Chapter 7. Curriculum planning for pupils with speech and language difficulties defines the special responsibilities of the course participants and is at the core of their interest in their work. Students' emotional investment in this part of the course would have been high. Some students, including the three case study teachers discussed in Chapter 9, reported positively on this material and its assignment, suggesting that it had been of continuing benefit, not only to themselves but to their wider work group. On the other hand, the process of reflecting on practice aroused

anger or disappointment in others (in Chapter 7) and did not match their expectations of curriculum development. The re-written material approached curriculum development more explicitly as 'Action Research', perhaps taking the teachers' thinking about curriculum development to a different level or presenting it from a novel perspective. However, as shown in Chapter 7, several teachers who responded positively to the action research project still expressed a wish for specific methods to deal with particular difficulties of children. Experienced teachers already have expertise. Course themes need to be sufficiently transparent in their relevance to engage students' interest but also provide a stimulus for their own further thinking and action. Explicit presentation should help participants to understand the rationale behind materials and develop confidence to test their own current knowledge.

Several lessons can be learned from this aspect of the evaluation. The complex interaction of subject matter, its presentation, individual students in their work settings and the support available to them is evident in the evaluation. Materials which failed to achieve a balance between old and new information failed to stimulate motivation for learning in many students. Misreading of what was appropriate, relevant and realistic for classroom practitioners meant that some materials were initially inadequate. However, conceptually demanding material and new theoretical perspectives can be successfully presented if they are seen to have meaning in the context of the teachers' work. There is a potential to influence change but students must see the relevance of materials if they are to implement new ideas. Consideration of students' responses is vital if a course is to be relevant to their needs. In this example of distance education, the relatively small scale of the operation enables course staff to be involved with all aspects of the system and to be aware of students' and tutors' reactions. However, unless organisational aspects of the course are flexible, the monitoring can not lead to positive developmental changes. In this case, materials are produced in-house and changes can be made quickly. The advantage of this type of involvement over the large course team approach discussed in Chapter 1 can be seen.

Effects on practice

The potential for professional development courses to change practice will vary according to many factors and there are mixed reports of success in this respect. Increasingly, there are calls for evidence that professional development activities of teachers have impact on classroom practice (Teacher Training Agency, 1995). This study suggests that in distance education, possibilities to affect practice arise because the practitioners remain in their posts and because they have a set of materials to take to work. It is suggested however, that immediate effects on practice are not always apparent but that course participants may see effects over a long period and, in retrospect, may see areas of the course positively, which at the time were not appreciated.

Critics of distance education often consider face-to-face methods as the normal and best way to present courses and distance education is often developed because there is no alternative. This was the case in Best's (1993) critique of distance education against traditional courses in visual impairment, referred to in Chapter 1. The distance mode provides opportunities to people who would not otherwise be able to, or wish to, undertake courses in the traditional way, by attending an educational institution. There may be other motivations for supporting courses by distance education. Perry (1976) suggested that

'to release highly trained and expensive staff for long full-time continuing education is a very unattractive proposition for employers as well as costly for the nation (p284)

The project was set up in order to provide for a group of professionals who did not have development opportunities. A campus-based course had failed to be supported by sufficient numbers, largely due to the cost of full-time secondment and the lack of priority given to the area of special need.

This study suggests it is possible to argue certain advantages of distance education over campus-based courses for professional development. The materials can provide course members with a lasting source of information and further reference during and after the course. Because the teachers were all currently practising in the field of speech and language difficulties, activities and assignments built in to the course offered considerable opportunity to address day-to-day issues, which would not have been possible in a campus-based course.

Chapter 8 demonstrated how the wider working context of practitioners feeds into, and is in turn, influenced by the course. There can be no guarantee that colleagues will become aware that a member of staff is involved in a course simply because the course is undertaken by distance education, as they might be if they were away from their post full- or part-time. Many on this course were not allowed study time by their employers. It would be possible for a teacher to say nothing about their course at work. However, feedback suggests that for almost all who responded, colleagues were aware of the course. There was said to be some effect on colleagues and more positive than negative effects were perceived. In some cases, colleagues had become involved as the student progressed through the course. Some of the work systems were reported to have been affected by the perceived increase in knowledge and information the student gained through the course. In others, group members became actively involved in course-related tasks to the extent that there were reported changes in their practice, for example in their curriculum work and overall planning activities, discussed in Chapter 7.

The pressure of time and the stress and extra burden of a course was a more negative theme throughout the research. Even though practical benefits resulted from the course some participants continued to believe that campus-based courses are best because more time is available. Distance learning can be a cheap option for those who fund teachers. The main expenditure is on course fees, often with no expectation that the

teacher will need time for the course. The additional workload which some colleagues had to carry while a teacher did the course must be weighed against the positive effects. The pressure of undertaking an award-bearing course whilst under obligation to a full-time job was considerable for some of the teachers. They suggested that they did not work to their usual capacity at times, being tired and affected by course work. Although assignments were related to practice, they clearly required additional work. Colleagues were generally asked to cover when teachers were permitted some time off for study. The balance between the reported positive impact on practice and the negative impact on the group is clearly an issue. In some cases, resentment developed from the additional workload. The gains in expertise of one member may be countered by some reduction in harmony of a work group. Systemic effects can be both positive and negative.

The possibility that there might be change in a whole work system as a result of an individual undertaking a course, is an important consideration for all of the stakeholders in professional development activities. On the one hand, positive changes in a system may be seen to offer excellent value for money by employers and those who fund teachers on courses. On the other hand, members of a work group and their managers will need to consider how much they want such widespread change to result. Individuals enrolling on courses will need to become aware of the likely responses from members of their work group and of how far they can influence systemic and individual change. Course organisers will need to consider how far this is to be their responsibility and to what extent they will prepare students for this.

It is not possible to be certain that greater effects were felt in the work contexts of the teachers because the course was by distance learning. However, some features of distance education may increase this possibility and the teachers' descriptions of their work settings suggest ways in which impact could be enhanced. If the teachers take the course materials to school with them, their colleagues may become aware of them. They

may be completely deterred by the amount of reading and work involved in such a course. Alternatively, they may become interested and use the materials for discussion. The extent and success of this may depend on the school ethos and relationships already existing in the work group. Course-related activities and assignments can be designed to be highly visible in the workplace, specifically related to practical work in the classroom or school and in many cases, can also oblige the student to involve work colleagues.

The responses in this evaluation suggest that examination of teachers' practice may have to be undertaken with particular sensitivity if it is to be successful. The systemic thinking activity discussed in Chapter 8 asked teachers to consider the course's perceived role in changing their work context. It had been assumed that the teachers would find benefit from engaging in this way of thinking about their practice. However, the comments on feedback forms suggested that several participants had not felt positively about the activity. Some comments were offered by the colleague who conducted the session at the summer school. Although mainly working with nurses, social workers and psychotherapists, she had conducted sessions with teachers in the past and had noted that the reactions of the professional groups were different. She thought that perhaps teachers were used to working unobserved so that the activity may have been seen as over-intrusive by some of them. Other groups may be observed more and supervised by other members of their profession with whom they would be used to discussing and reflecting on their practice. Literature until recently endorsed this view. Collins (1991) suggested that discussion of practice may have been less common for teachers. The private nature of classroom practice was noted by Norwich (1985) in a discussion of teachers' professional socialisation. He cited a number of authors who observe the classroom-focussed development of teachers to be at the expense of wider methodological and theoretically-based perspectives. This may be apposite to the teachers in this study who may have been wary of the approach required by the systemic view. Diamond (1991) reflects a similar experience in attempting to get experienced

teachers to enact roles aimed at helping them to see alternative views of their working lives. Some of the teachers were reported to be 'extremely defensive' and unwilling to participate, saying that it would be more practical to apply the theory to their pupils. Diamond cites Greene's view that it would be cruel to 'offer the gift of freedom and self-transformation' (p65) to people who wish to remain unchanged. Throughout this study, activities asked individuals to reflect on their roles and relationships. This can be difficult for some and it is necessary to accept that people have the right not to participate.

It is possible that the group felt they had been involved in enough evaluation activities. In this new course there had been a variety of activities and questionnaires related to evaluation, resulting in varying levels of response. There had never been any attempt to conceal from the students the fact that, just as the course had grown out of a research project, its further development was also the subject of research. The students were encouraged to reflect on their practice as the course organisers were attempting to examine the results of their planning through action research. A systemic view would see this as important to the evolution of the course and in giving the teachers experience of participating in a co-evolving system (Campbell, Draper and Huffington, 1988).

If a course is to be thought of as an opportunity to benefit a wider group of staff it is only fair that the identified student and their colleagues are prepared for this from the start. Some activities to promote systemic thinking could be introduced in early study skills materials which are sent out to students before they begin the course. Others could be introduced as the course develops. Follow up activities could assist in promoting continuing effects from the course once it has finished. The teachers should be forewarned before embarking on the course, that they will be given opportunities to look at themselves and their practice as well as at their pupils and their needs. The course organisers can be explicit in introductory materials for a course and encourage employers and other members of a system to negotiate the practicalities of operation. The

enhancement of professional effectiveness should be an objective of a course but responsibility for this has to be undertaken jointly with a school or service and the named student. Otherwise, students may find themselves in an uncomfortable position between a course and their employment situation.

Some of the obstacles experienced in the research might be reduced as teachers' practice becomes increasingly public. School inspections now require the assessment of classroom activities and there may be a changing climate which will make schools and teachers' practice more available for discussion. Opportunities to take course activities into classrooms may be developing and, as this is now recommended (Teacher Training Agency, 1995), there could be advantages for courses, teachers and their schools. It may also encourage teachers to be more openly reflective about what they think and do.

Responses from teachers in this study suggest that it is now questionable whether a full-time course aimed at professional development can have the required positive impact on practice. Many of the teachers in this study, as in Best's (1993) work discussed in Chapter 1, appreciated the opportunity to relate the distance education course to their practice. They saw that a full-time secondment, although advantageous in many ways, might not answer their needs. It should not be difficult for employers and teachers' managers to imagine the potential impact on practice of a distance learning course. They however, are at present operating under severe financial constraints and presumably see distance education as the ideal way to develop teachers and improve the quality of their work, without loss of time or money. Some of the teachers expressed frustration and experienced exhaustion from the course. They had little time to reflect or follow up ideas and further reading and in the circumstances it seems remarkable that they were able to describe any positive changes to their thinking or practice. Given a little more time, and more formal engagement of employers and colleagues, as an essential element of the distance learning process, perhaps there could be even greater benefits to classroom practice.

Particular implications for teachers and speech and language therapists

There is a potential for the professions to collaborate and enhance their work with pupils who may have difficulties in language and communication. However, in Chapter 2, it was suggested that different frameworks for the understanding of language difficulties lead to obstacles to collaboration between teachers and speech and language therapists.

Locke and Beech (1991) believe that most of the necessary work can be undertaken by classroom teachers because

'staff changes within the different agencies and the time involved in developing and maintaining effective links often means that at best ... liaison is irregular' p118.

It is not acceptable to abandon efforts to collaborate before attempting to remove the obstacles and the practicalities and vagaries of employment practices are not sufficient reason to dismiss the potential for collaboration. From the evidence of this study, it is clear that speech and language therapists play a prominent part in the professional lives of teachers of pupils with speech and language difficulties. There may be more positive ways of achieving benefits for pupils.

Until recently, therapists have had little information in their initial professional education about the school curriculum and the initial training of teachers contains little detail on language development or language difficulty. As suggested in Chapter 2, therapists have drawn their information on language from linguistics and psycholinguistics whereas teachers have often emphasised reading or social use of language. Therapists focus on the detail of language comprehension and production and its underlying processes, with less consideration of the social context of language. This different conceptualisation of language in the two professions suggests a potential for difficulties in attempts to collaborate. It would be valuable for the teachers' and therapists' information about language to overlap and for each to understand more about

the other's practice and points of view. Pupils might then receive more comprehensive and appropriate support.

Wright (1992) found that where the collaboration was well managed, teachers and therapists learned from each other through 'cognitive change' and believed their work had more effective outcomes for children. Classroom teachers would rarely have the time or opportunity to undertake the detailed analysis of language and related skills which a therapist can offer. A therapist could not undertake broad curriculum planning. Provided therapists have the opportunity to work in schools and are well informed about educational practice, their work can complement the teachers' to provide more effective activities through the curriculum.

From the inception of the course, some inquirers asked whether the course enables teachers to become speech therapists. Advisers and administrators have also suggested that their motivation for funding a teacher on the course arises from difficulties in obtaining adequate speech therapy. This evaluation study suggests that teachers already have enough to do as managers of the curriculum but a specialist course should help them to work more effectively with children and with their therapist-colleagues. The revisions to the material on curriculum planning (Chapter 7) asked the teachers to engage their colleagues, particularly mentioning therapists, in the curriculum planning activities. This is clearly a way in which teachers and therapists can collaborate, each using their particular expertise. There is a considerable potential for them to learn from each other in such activities. Further, this type of practice can serve to counter the criticism that therapists' work is unrelated to children's educational reality if it is specifically designed to fit in with the curriculum.

The course can not make up for inadequacies in provision and aims to enable teachers to be more competent in the special responsibilities of their work. It can raise their awareness of what to expect from therapists so that they make appropriate demands for

adequate services. There is a potential in the course to benefit children by teachers' enhanced knowledge and skills. Teachers should be less likely to identify children as 'language disordered' or to blame parents when their children have communication difficulties. There may be some children whose difficulties can be reduced or resolved because of their contact with a specialist teacher, without additional need for speech and language therapy.

One of the most striking aspects of the 'course at work' activities in Chapter 8 is the number of times the teachers said that their speech-language therapist colleagues had been positively affected by them doing the course. In many cases they perceived that the therapist now felt happier because the teacher 'understood them better'. They suggested that they now understood the terms used by the therapist and secondly, understood the way in which the therapist works. All of the examples seem to imply that therapists talk in a language not normally understood by teachers and responses in Chapter 8 suggest that some teachers see it as their responsibility to access therapists' knowledge. The course has helped to reduce this difficulty.

Much of the course provided teachers with information which has traditionally been part of the working knowledge of speech and language therapists. It also shed light on the work of therapists and the teachers could begin to feel some confidence in their own role in working with pupils described as having speech or language difficulties. It raises questions about responsibilities for language learning. Speech therapists may be claiming ownership of language but some teachers may collude with this and be reluctant to take on ownership of language for themselves or believe they can take their share with therapists. It may be that unless knowledge about language and language difficulty is firmly contextualised in classrooms or taught as 'language in education', some of the teachers have difficulty in relating to the information. Professional courses probably cultivate such attitudes. At undergraduate level there is pressure to reduce teaching and learning to that which is immediately and obviously professionally and

practically relevant, often for economic rather than pedagogical reasons. There is a potential in this to tighten the boundaries around the knowledge base of individual professions making it more difficult to share areas of common value with other practitioners. Therapists and teachers will be equally at risk if their initial education becomes shorter and if there is an excessive focus on competencies, rather than on competence in general. Knowledge about language has relevance for all contexts and the underlying theoretical perspectives are not different for teachers or therapists, or for other practitioners. This evaluation supports a rationale for a sharing between professions of sound theoretical perspectives to underpin their respective and distinctive professional approaches. This may be effectively achieved through professional development activities such as this one, by distance education.,

Collaboration in practice

An understanding of therapists' frameworks and professional jargon will go some way towards helping the work of teachers, but it is not enough. A few teachers in this study believed there were tangible effects on the collaborative planning and organisation of work with the therapist. Although some teachers mention better mutual understanding between themselves and the therapists, Wright (1994) suggests that therapists have often used a consultancy approach to their work with other professionals, suggesting a superior, 'expert' position, rather than a truly collaborative interdependence. She found that although intervention with a child was usually carried out by both teacher and therapist, the therapist generally undertook the assessment and planning activities, in effect, taking the lead. Such an approach would not suggest that therapists have found it necessary to understand teachers and their work. It would also explain criticisms that therapists' work is often decontextualised and unrelated to a child's life in school.

There are therefore implications for speech-language therapists when a teacher undertakes a course in what some therapists seem to consider to be their specialism. The therapists who were thought to be negatively affected by the course were 'threatened'

that the teachers were learning too much about therapy. Materials both preceding and during the course may need to take account of this, giving support to teachers in their efforts to collaborate with therapists. There may also be value in designing activities to help therapists' understanding of teachers. In 1994 speech and language therapists were accepted as students on the course, joining teachers in tutorials and course activities. Evaluation of their response to their learning will be important.

Perhaps a mark of success of the course would be the teachers' enhanced ability to convey their special knowledge and skills to the therapist. The teachers in the case studies in Chapter 9 reported increased confidence and perceived status in the eyes of colleagues. This endorses findings from other studies. Cope, Inglis, Riddell and Sulhunt (1992) suggest that increased confidence should be seen as no small gain from a professional development activity. In the field of speech and language difficulties, it may serve a very useful function in creating better alliances with colleagues.

A framework for language difficulties

In Chapter 2, traditional approaches to the conceptualisation of speech and language difficulties were presented. The development of teachers' expertise suggests that different frameworks are called for. The course demonstrates clearly that teachers have a legitimate role in work with language difficulties and a distinctive contribution to make. There are areas of overlap between the work of teachers and therapists but it was noted that the two groups of practitioners see language differently. A more comprehensive approach to children's spoken and written language development and difficulties is necessary which takes in views of both processing and social use and the interrelationship between them. Therapists need to understand 'performance' in social and educational settings and teachers can benefit from more detailed information on the components and underpinnings of language. Both professions might consider critically their own perspectives and to try to understand each others' approach.

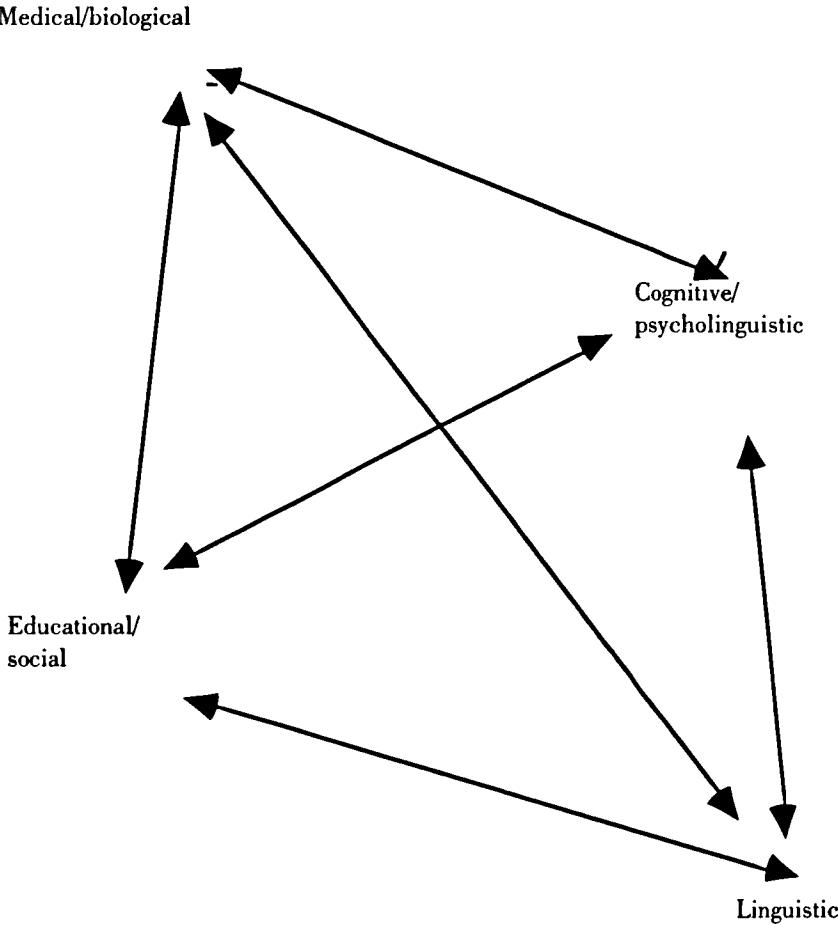
Speech and language therapists were originally heavily influenced by medical explanations for communication problems and then readily adopted linguistic approaches to their description. More recently, cognitive approaches to learning have influenced the work of psychologists and speech and language therapists and have the potential to impact upon classroom learning. The clinical context which has prevailed for therapists' work within the National Health Service has probably not been conducive to them taking account of educational or social perspectives. Educational professionals have, in recent years, often rejected medical or biological explanations of difficulties. They have criticised these as excessively focusing on the individual as the bearer of a problem, without adequate consideration of the educational or social environment and how this relates to individual performance. In the early 1980s, in discussing a sociology of special education, Tomlinson's (1982) observations on such professional differences led her to suggest there was a power struggle between medical, psychological and educational personnel who all had an interest in the field.

In order to consider children's speech and language difficulties from a broader perspective, an approach is suggested which might be appropriate in educational contexts and which potentially links the knowledge and skills of teachers and therapists. It may loosen some of the boundaries which exist between different professional groups. The approach attempts to bring together the medical, linguistic and language processing models described earlier and to consider ways in which they might interact with social-educational frameworks. None of the models alone is adequate to assist in the planning of work in the field of speech and language difficulties and each approach may take a different emphasis at different times.

In his reappraisal of special educational needs, Norwich (1990) presents a 'bio-psycho-social model' which acknowledges the relevance and interactions of alternative perspectives. He sets this within general systems theory which seeks to explain human functioning as interactive and hierarchical. Indeed, language is itself interactive and

hierarchical in structure and analysts accept a systemic approach to its functioning. The term 'eclectic-systematic' is suggested by Cooper and Ideus (1995) in the field of emotional and behaviour difficulties, because of its efforts to combine approaches in a principled way. A similar approach to language difficulties is appropriate. It would be extremely cumbersome to try to create a term or phrase to embrace the interaction of the main approaches to language disability but the model proposed combines medical (biological) information with linguistic description and language processing information, together with details of educational/social context and expectations, including the people, children and adults, who are involved. Figure 10.1 shows the interlinks between the models in current use.

Fig 10.1 Links between approaches to speech and language difficulties



In this approach to speech and language difficulties, a methodical and questioning approach is required which draws on information from a range of sources. Information from medical, linguistic and processing perspectives is important but it will be essential to consider these from the point of view of the child, the communicative partner and the context of the communication. Children's language needs to be considered in terms of other people's behaviour and what is expected. In school, it will be necessary to take account, not only of how a child communicates, but of how other people use language. This will include the language used and demanded for the curriculum and other classroom activities. Before deciding that a child has a speech or a language 'difficulty' it will be necessary to consider whether the language used by teachers and other adults is appropriate and what the adults are expecting of the child. The curriculum can be full of hazards if new vocabulary and concepts are introduced without careful checking that everyone understands each new word and idea. If the language of the teacher and the language of the curriculum have been taken into account, there may be children who still seem to have greater difficulty than most others in their group. It will be necessary to look in more detail at those children. The approach accepts that there will be factors specific to an individual which will interact with psychological, social and educational factors. As far as possible, each of the factors must be identified and described, using the perspectives of different professionals, working collaboratively. The inclusion of educational and social information will provide a context for any linguistic analysis or psycholinguistic processing. 'Competence' will therefore always be related to 'performance'. One of the purposes of providing professional development opportunities in speech and language difficulties to teachers is to help them to work towards this approach. Further, the opening of these opportunities to speech and language therapists could have a similar effect.

A framework for development and evaluation

The course as a socio-technical system

In Chapter 4, it was suggested that methodologies are required for course development and evaluation which take account of the systemic nature of a professional development activity. In addressing the research questions about processes and implications of the course, it came to be seen as an 'open system' in which interdependent parts react and respond to each other and in which there is unavoidable and desirable interaction with a wider environment. The system can be examined, for research purposes, as a series of parts but functionally, it must be considered as a whole. It is proposed that the perspectives of *socio-technical systems* are particularly appropriate to this study and may be more generally relevant to development and evaluation of courses of this nature.

Socio-technical systems take account of the critical part played by external, environmental influences and interpersonal reactions in the functioning of technical enterprises (Emery and Trist, 1960). First applied in the 1940s to industrial enterprises such as coal mining and textiles production, socio-technical systems can be equally relevant to course analysis. It is a particularly appropriate framework when distance education has sometimes been described as 'industrialised' education (Peters, 1967, reprinted in Keegan, 1994).

The elements of a socio-technical system are, firstly, the *technology* or the technical sub-system. In a course or an educational activity, the special knowledge and skills presented as the curriculum and other teaching and learning activities are the technology. The social or *psycho-social* sub-system consists of the 'interactions, expectations and aspirations, sentiments and values of the participants' (Kast and Rosenzweig, 1981 p49). The students' social environment, at home and in the workplace and their emotional and psychological responses play an important part in their professional development

'...these social relationships ... have a profound influence, for good or ill, on the efficiency with which the work is accomplished, as well as the health and satisfaction of those involved' (Taylor, 1994 p131)

The course's *organisational* structure is included as a subsystem 'intermeshed between the technical and social subsystems' (Kast and Rosenzweig, 1981 p49). This relates to processes mediating between the technical and social subsystems and includes organisational aspects of the workings of the course, the management of materials and the tutoring system. These interact with the University's *institutional* system which influences the way these structures are set up.

In this study, because the enterprise interacts with its environment, an *environmental* layer is added in order to take account of characteristics of teachers' personal and professional environments and the educational milieu in which they work. The system could be continued into the wider world of education and the political system but for the purposes of this analysis the system is delimited as the 'world' of education of pupils with speech and language difficulties. This sets the boundaries of the system in this particular study although another might view the system differently. Kast and Rosenzweig (1981) point out that the boundaries of a social system are 'rather vaguely formed' and 'highly permeable' and that in the study of social organisations, drawing the boundaries is 'a matter of convenience and strategy' (p50).

A useful analysis of the course can not be made by examining subsystems in isolation but must look at the ways in which they interact. A socio-technical systems approach can provide understanding of aspects of the course deemed 'good' and 'bad', relevant and irrelevant, difficult and easy, and can take into account the very different perceptions and circumstances of a range of actors. The approach highlights the fact that there are no simple answers to course effectiveness and no simple cause and effect explanations.

It also emphasises that

' ... the primary task in managing the enterprise as a whole is to relate the whole system to its environment and is not an internal regulation *per se*' (Emery and Trist, 1960 reprinted in Emery 1981 p332)

Thus, at professional development level, a course must have relevance to its outside world and conditions for maintaining its operations and for success or disfunction

'lie both within and without the enterprise' (Emery and Trist, 1981 p324).

A visual representation of the structure of the course as a sociotechnical system is provided in Figure 10.2 although a two-dimensional diagram does not easily convey the multiplicity of possible interactions. The Figure shows the elements considered essential in this course. Each of them has linkages with every other part. The students are seen across all parts and no part can be considered unless the students are there. The removal of any of the elements would affect the whole system, as would the introduction of a new element.

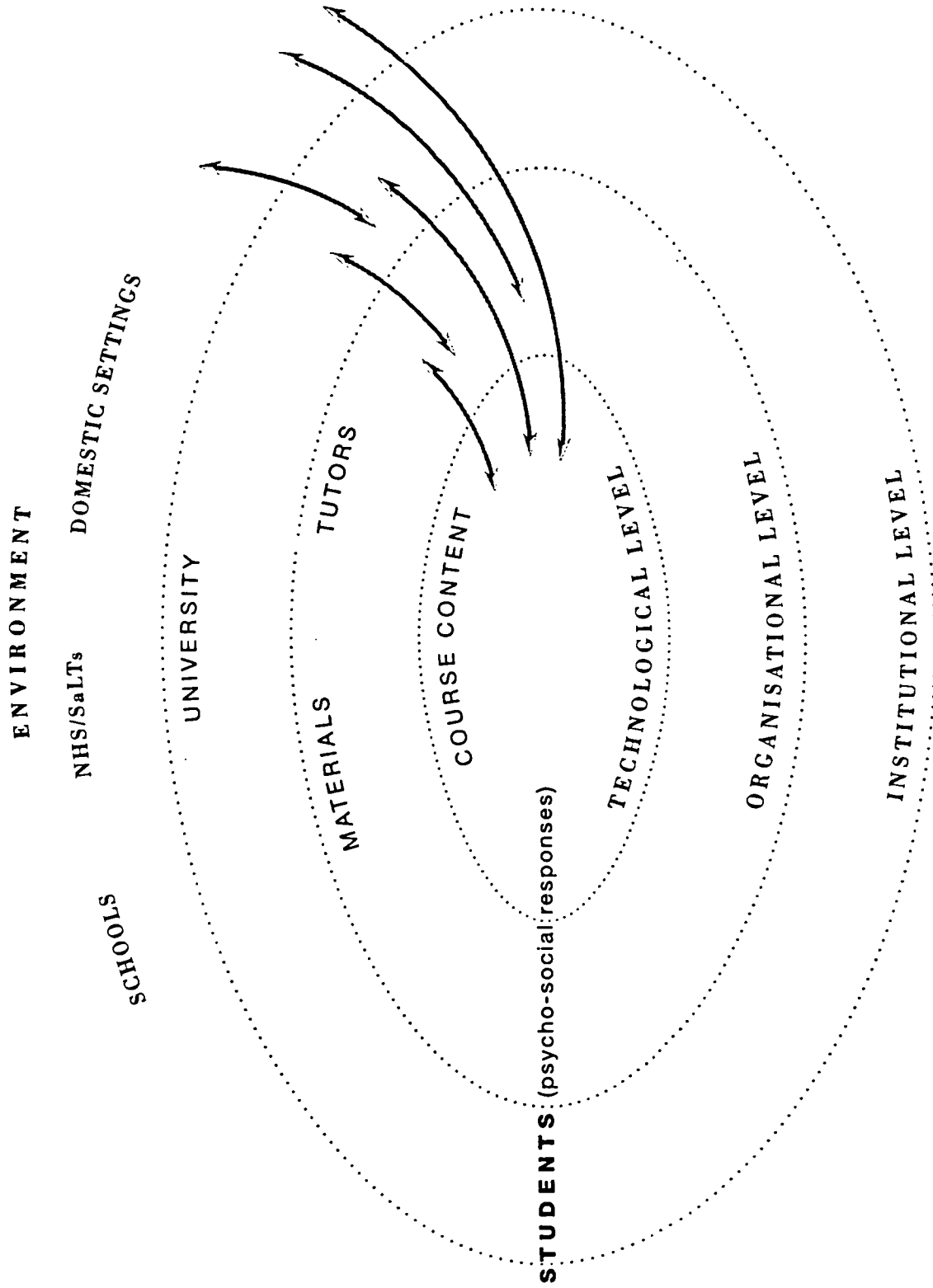


Fig 10.2 The course as a socio-technical system

Conclusions

This study set out to examine the main processes in the development of an innovative distance education programme and to consider whether any of these processes had wider implications. Additionally, it was relevant to consider particular issues in the context of speech and language difficulties in education. The significant processes were found to be: those relating to support for students; responses to course content and opportunities to increase the relevance of the content through rapid modification; the potential impact of distance education on teachers' practice; the potential for this particular course to affect collaborative practice between teachers and speech and language therapists. The development of a course for teachers also offers an opportunity to consider a new framework for understanding speech and language difficulties.

The study has not endorsed Best's view (see Chapter 1) of disadvantages in distance education for professional development. Indeed, provided materials are perceived as appropriate by the students and mechanisms are set up for students to be supported by experienced professionals and to have contact with other similarly motivated students, their learning can be particularly fruitful. These findings resonate with other work in distance education which suggests that teacher education 'needs to be rooted in a theory of education as social practice' (Leach, 1996). In other words, opportunities to talk about their work in tutorial groups, collaborative activities and partnerships help professionals to learn.

Distance education can have identifiable impact on teachers' practice and on the work of others. It is encouraging that this study endorses current trends in thinking on school development. It concurs with Ainscow's (1995) view that collaborative learning which can be located within schools should be promoted (see Chapter 1). However, the study suggests that more formalised links with students' work settings may encourage a more supportive environment for teachers' learning. Ainscow also suggests that in order to

'make it all happen', time needs to be set aside for teachers to support each other and to explore their practice. This will only be possible with the blessing and cooperation of school managers. A planned project (Miller, Tilstone and Smith, 1996) will now link distance education coursework specifically with school development plans through negotiation with senior managers and will explicitly engage colleagues in course activities. In the present climate where costs for release of professionals from their work are limited, distance education can provide effective development opportunities and can bridge a gap between schools and educational institutions. All aspects of a course need to be considered in relation to each other and as functional parts of a whole development and education system.

This philosophy applies equally to conceptions of special educational needs, for example, speech and language difficulties and the ways in which different professionals work together. In the context of education and health services, systemic thinking would suggest that many identified problems must be considered as part of a whole interactional phenomenon. In special education it is suggested that

'a systems framework promises to provide the basis upon which different professional groups can coordinate the services they offer children with difficulties' (Norwich, 1990 p32).

However, an important obstacle to the development of systemic thinking may be that people are generally more concerned with their individual actions than with their 'contribution to what We do' (Street, 1994 p4). Personal needs and plans are usually more relevant to the individual than consideration of the process of interaction of the group. This comment may be applied by those who criticise professionals for their narrow self-interest and poor collaborative efforts. It suggests that all parties in professional development activities will need to be helped to promote effective interactional models and practice.

'The main implication of this for the field is that we need to think more in terms of inter-relationships and less in terms of fixed dichotomies' (Norwich, 1996 p103).

As this study has demonstrated, interactive perspectives can be helpful in understanding development and change in the needs of professionals, the pupils with whom they work and the settings in which they work.

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APPENDICES

**School of Education
The University of Birmingham
in Association with
the School of Speech Therapy
Birmingham Polytechnic**

**Distance - Learning Course for Teachers of
Children with Speech and Language Difficulties**

Evaluation of Course material.

This questionnaire is designed to help us evaluate the Course and its usefulness to teachers. Please answer all of the questions and feel free to add any specific comments of your own . Your responses will help us to develop the course further.

Module..... Course Text

Title

1. How much time did you spend working on this Text? Include all work associated with the Text. Please be as accurate as possible, to the nearest whole hour.

..... hours

2. In general, how did you rate the amount of work required?

excessive	reasonable	insufficient
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. How difficult did you find the material?

very difficult	difficult	fair	easy	very easy
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. How clearly were the ideas presented?

very clearly	clearly	adequately	much of it unclear	totally unclear
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. How interesting did you find the work?

very interesting	interesting	fair	not very interesting	boring
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. How new to you was the subject matter of the material?

all very new	much of it new	new in parts	most of it not new	none of it new
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. How relevant do you consider the material to be to your work as a teacher?

highly relevant	relevant	fairly relevant	mostly irrelevant	totally irrelevant
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. List the areas within the Course Text that you found most useful.

9. List the areas within the Text which were not given sufficient consideration.

10. List any areas which you hoped would be included in the Text and were not.

11. Please add any other comments on this part of the course.

Many thanks for your help.

Please give this form, when completed, to your tutor.

**School of Education
The University of Birmingham**

**Distance - Learning Course for Teachers of
Children with Speech and Language Difficulties**

Course Evaluation. This questionnaire is designed to help in the evaluation of the Course as a whole and its usefulness to teachers. Please answer all of the questions and feel free to add any specific comments of your own. Your responses will help in the further development of the Course.

Please first provide the following information about yourself and your work:

Please describe your present post

Give the age range of the pupils you work with

Please give your age

20 - 25

26 - 35

36 - 45

Over 45

Please write down your post-school qualifications

**1 About how much time did you spend working on the Course each week?
(tick one box only)**

less than 5 hours	<input type="checkbox"/>	6 - 10 hours	<input type="checkbox"/>	11 - 15 hours	<input type="checkbox"/>
16 -20 hours	<input type="checkbox"/>	More than 20 hours	<input type="checkbox"/>		

If there were any exceptions, please give details.

2 In general, how did you rate the amount of work required? (tick one box only)

excessive	quite heavy	reasonable	insufficient	variable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**3 In general, how difficult did you find the course materials and activities?
(tick one box only)**

very difficult	difficult	fair	easy	very easy	variable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If there were exceptions, please give details.

4 How interesting did you find the course? (tick one box only)

very	interesting	fair	not very	boring	variable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5 How useful were the tutorial meetings during the Course? (tick one box only)

Essential	Very useful	Quite useful	Not very useful	Useless
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please elaborate and say how the tutorials helped or did not help.

6 How useful were the two summer schools during the course? (tick one box only)

Essential	Very useful	Quite useful	Not very useful	Useless
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please elaborate and say how the summer schools helped or did not help.

7 How new to you was the subject matter of the Course as a whole? (tick one box only)

All very
new

Much of
it new

New in
parts

Most of it
not new

None of
it new

8 How would you rate the balance of theory and practice in the Course? (tick one box only)

Too much theory

Too much practice

About the right balance

9 How relevant do you consider the course as a whole to be to your practice as a teacher? (tick one box only)

Highly
relevant

Relevant

Fairly
relevant

Mostly
irrelevant

Totally
irrelevant

10 How much would you say your thinking has changed as a result of the course? (tick one box only)

A lot

A little

Not at all

If you believe that your thinking has changed, please elaborate and give examples of how it has changed.

11 How much do you think your practice has changed as a result of the course? (tick one box only)

A lot

A little

Not at all

If you believe that your practice has changed, please elaborate and give examples of how it has changed.

12 Do you think that anything has changed in your school/unit or work context as a result of you undertaking the course?

Yes

No

If 'yes' please describe this

13 How useful to your practice were the set assignments? (tick one box only)

All highly useful	mostly useful	mostly fairly useful	mostly irrelevant	totally irrelevant
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

14 On a scale of 1-6 how well would you say that each of the following topics were covered in the Course? 6 indicates that the topic was well covered, 1 indicates that it was not well covered.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
a. Language assessment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Normal language development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Classroom management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Working with parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Working with other professionals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Materials for use with children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Theory of speech and language disorders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Special education policy/legislation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. Child development (apart from language)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Educational assessment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
k. Alternative and augmentative communication systems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
l. Linguistic sciences (analysis and description of language)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
m. Report writing, reviews, statements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
n. Wider curriculum matters (other than national curriculum)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
o. Research design (evaluation and reporting on practice; programmes, case studies)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

15 List the areas within the course that you found most useful.

16 List any areas which were not given sufficient consideration within the course or which you had hoped would be included and were not.

17 Would you choose distance learning again for this type of specialist course?

Yes

No

Please give reasons for your answer

18 Please add any other comments about anything to do with the course.

Please give your name and daytime telephone number if you would be willing to be interviewed in more detail about your experience of the course.

Please complete and return this form within a week of receiving it.

Thank you.

Carol Miller
School of Education
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham
B15 2TT

Tel 0121 414 4853

Fax 0121 414 4865

5 Where is the tutorial held?

In a student's house

In the tutor's house

In the tutor's place of work

In a student's place of work

Other (please describe)

6 Which of the following activities take place during your tutorials? (tick as many as you wish)

- a) Tutor presents prepared material
- b) Students present prepared material
- c) Pre-planned discussion led by tutor
- d) Pre-planned discussion led by one of the students
- e) Discussion of any, spontaneously arising topics
- f) Handing out of photocopied extracts from books or journals
- g) Handing out of photocopied sheets prepared by tutor
- h) Handing out of photocopied sheets prepared by students
- i) Exchange of information between students about their practice
- j) Discussion of assignments before writing them
- k) Discussion of assignments after handing back
- l) Discussion of course texts, including activities
- m) Tutor-discussion with individual students (apart from the main group) during tutorial time
- n) Other (please describe)

7 From the items in the list at No. 6 that you have ticked, select the **three that you spend most time on in the tutorial sessions.**

i)

ii)

iii)

8 Again, from the items in the list at No. 6 that you ticked, select the **three that you personally find the most valuable.** (These may not necessarily be the same as the three in No 7)

i)

ii)

iii)

9 **List any other activities you would like included in your tutorials**

10 **How useful are the tutorial meetings? (tick one box only)**

Essential

Very
useful

Quite
useful

Not very
useful

Useless

11 **Is an agenda set for the tutorial?**

Yes/No (delete one)

12 **If yes, is this set**

At the previous tutorial

At the beginning of the tutorial

Between tutorials

13 **Again, if yes, is it set by:**

The tutor

The students

Discussion between tutor and students

14 **Do you see any of the other students from your group, specifically to discuss things to do with the course, outside of tutorial time?**

Yes/No (delete one)

15 **Do you ever telephone other students from your group, specifically to discuss things to do with the course?**

Yes/No (delete one)

16 **Have you ever seen the tutor alone, specifically to discuss things to do with the course, outside of tutorial time?**

Yes/No (delete one)

17 **Have you ever telephone the tutor, between tutorials, specifically to discuss things to do with the course?**

Yes/No (delete one)

18 **What do you personally see as the main function of the tutorials?**

19 **Please write anything else you wish to about the tutorials.**

Very many thanks for completing this questionnaire. Please return it in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope by

Carol Miller

Distance learning course: speech and language difficulties

Using the course in your work system

Name:

1. Briefly describe and then map your work setting, showing the key people involved.

1a Brief description

1b Map

2a Which of the colleagues in your work setting have been most POSITIVELY affected by you doing the course? (give their work title, not their name)

2b Please say how they have been affected.

3a Which of the colleagues in your work setting have been most NEGATIVELY affected by you doing the course? (give their work title, not their name)

3b Please say how they have been affected.

4 If you think that no-one has been affected either way, why do think this is?

5 Now, pretend that you are the colleague, or one of the colleagues identified at 2 above (ie the person who has been positively affected)

Complete the sentences below, AS THOUGH YOU WERE THAT COLLEAGUE

5a As far as I can tell, the speech and language difficulties course at Birmingham seems to be :

5b Since(your name) started the course, s/he's

5c As far as I'm concerned, the BEST things about her/him doing the course are

5d As far as I'm concerned, the WORST things about her/him doing the course are

6 Now, pretend that you are the colleague identified at 3 above (ie the person who has been negatively affected)

Complete the sentences below, AS THOUGH YOU WERE THAT COLLEAGUE

6a As far as I can tell, the speech and language difficulties course at Birmingham seems to be

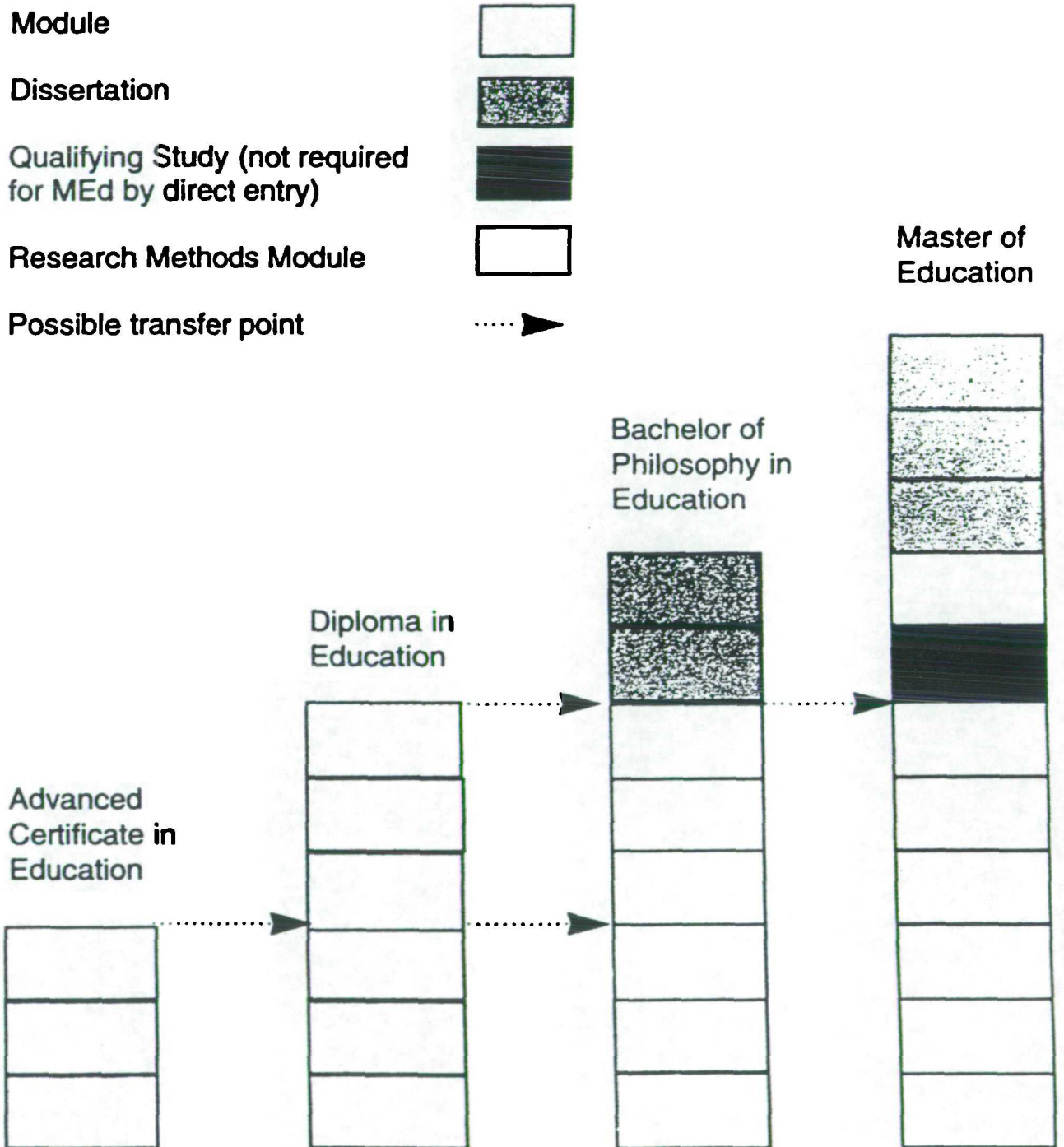
6b Since(your name) started the course, s/he's

6c As far as I'm concerned, the BEST things about her/him doing the course are

6d As far as I'm concerned, the WORST things about her/him doing the course are

Continued

Modular structure of courses in the School of Education



OUTLINE OF MODULE CONTENT

MODULE 1 THE NATURE AND DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION

Overall aims of the Module:

To introduce terminology for the discussion of human communication

To increase knowledge of child development with specific reference to the development of communication

1. Introduction to language
2. Early child development
3. Development of early communication
4. Adolescent development
5. Later language development
6. Development of literacy

MODULE 2 : DEVELOPMENTAL DIFFICULTIES OF COMMUNICATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Overall aims of the Module:

To begin to describe normal and disordered communication

To relate this to special educational needs

1. Language description 1
2. The nature of speech and language problems in children
3. The nature of special educational needs.

MODULE 3 : APPRAISAL OF THE CHILD WITH A LANGUAGE DIFFICULTY IN THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Overall aims of the Module:

To describe the nature of assessment of language difficulty and to provide a means of describing language

To consider ways of assessing language difficulties for educational purposes.

1. Language description 2
2. Assessment of speech and language
3. Language assessment in the classroom

MODULE 4: THE CHILD WITH A LANGUAGE DIFFICULTY AND THE CURRICULUM

Overall aims of the Module:

To identify and explore ways of teaching the child with a language difficulty

- 1 Planning for curriculum delivery
- 2 Curriculum: requirement, access and recording.

MODULE 5: EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND THE CHILD WITH A LANGUAGE DIFFICULTY

Overall aims of the Module:

To consider the management of children with language disorders in the educational setting

1. The professional team
2. Working with families
3. Alternative and augmentative forms of communication
4. Models of management.

MODULE 6: SPECIAL STUDIES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION (PROJECT MODULE)

Profile of the first cohort 1990-92

Age

Teachers in speech and language difficulties had had few professional development opportunities and many of them had been working in this field for some time. The questionnaires did not ask how long the respondents had been qualified to teach, or how long they had worked with children with speech and language difficulties. However, spontaneous comments in the questionnaires in the initial survey of needs indicated that a number had been 'waiting a long time for a course like this'.

The age banding of the 27 students in the first cohort responding to the final questionnaire was as follows:

20-25	0
26-35	2
36-45	18
over 45	7

Gender

Of the 27 respondents 25 were female, two were male.

Post-school qualifications

The following table shows the post-school award-bearing qualifications

Summary Sheet: Post school qualifications

Respondent	1 Cert Ed	2 BEd	3 Other Degree	4 PGCE	5 BPhd Ed	6 Cert/Dip SEN	7 Dip T.O.D.	8 Other Dip/Cert	9 Masters	10 PhD
1	*	*					*			
2	*					*				
3	*					*				
4	*									
5		*								
6	*							*		
7	*	*			*					
8	*					*				
9	*					*		*		
10		*								
11	*							*		
12	*					*				
13			*					*	*	
14			*	*					*	*
15		*						*		
16			*	*						
17	*							*		
18			*					*		
19	*									
20			*	*					*	
21	*		*							
22	*	*								
23	*					*				
24	*	*				*				
25	*		*							
26	*									
27	*									
Overall	18	7	7	3	1	7	1	7	3	1

Eleven categories of award were identified:	Number of teachers
Certificate in Education (Cert. Ed)	19
Bachelor of Education(BEd)	7
Other first degree	7
Post-graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)	3
Inservice degree in education (BPhil Ed)	1
Certificate or diploma in Special Educational Needs (Cert/dip SEN)	7
Diploma for teachers of the deaf (Dip. TOD)	1
Other post-qualification diploma or certificate	7
Masters degree (MA)	3
Doctorate (PhD)	1

A closer look at the figures provides information on the number of qualifications held by individual students and particular combinations of courses undertaken by the teachers.

The number of qualifications held by each student is as follows:

7 students had 1 qualification

13 students had 2 qualifications

6 students had 3 qualifications

1 student had 4 qualifications

Where students hold a single qualification, this is either a Certificate in Education or Bachelor of Education degree. One other student had a first degree with a PGCE.

The majority of the respondents (19) had more than one qualification. 8 had a diploma or certificate in special educational needs in addition to a Cert. Ed, including one who was a teacher of the deaf.

The 'other' diplomas and certificates were:

Respondent

- 6 Advanced diploma in language and the reading arts
- 9 Royal Society of Arts Diploma: Information Technology for Primary and Special Needs
- 11 Ordinary National Diploma: Business Studies
- 13 Diploma in Advanced Studies in Education: the teaching of reading
- 15 Certificate in Religious Education
- 17 Advanced Diploma in Further Professional Studies: Education in the Early Years
- 18 Advanced Diploma: Educational Studies

The Masters degrees held by the students were as follows:

- 13 MA: Special Education
- 14 MA: Fine Arts
- 20 MA (Oxon): English literature and language

The cohort therefore had a range of qualifications, only some of which might be specifically relevant to work with language difficulty. Although all teachers are potentially working with pupils with special educational needs, some of the teachers had little formal preparation for the work, although they may have considerable practical experience. The teachers with a Certificate in Education in particular would have completed a two year course with little or no formal opportunity to learn about the needs of pupils with language difficulty.

Additional scrutiny was made of those awards made by the Open University (OU) to indicate the familiarity of the students with the processes of distance education.

Respondents with Open University experience

- 9 Advanced diploma, applied studies into learning difficulties.
- 18 BA. and Part A of the Diploma in Educational Management

Work contexts

Respondents described their present post with age-range of pupils as follows: .

- 1 Head of Department for hearing impaired children and children with speech and language difficulties in a special school. 8-16 years
- 2 Assistant teacher in a language unit based at a mainstream primary school, also offering 'outreach support' to children in other mainstream schools. 3.5-9 years
- 3 Peripatetic teacher working with children with a variety of special needs. About to set up a unit for children with autism attached to a mainstream infant school. 4-11 years
- 4 Teacher in charge of a language unit. 8-11 years
- 5 Teacher in a school for children with specific speech and language disorders. (No age range given)
- 6 Teacher in a special school for children with moderate learning difficulties. 9-11 years
- 7 Teacher in a junior unit for children with speech and language disorders. 7-11 years
- 8 Language and communication teacher in a school for children with complex learning difficulties. 2-11 years
- 9 Teacher in charge of resource centre, based in a mainstream school, to provide for children with speech and language disorders. 3-7 years
- 10 Teacher in charge of a language unit attached to a mainstream primary school. (No age range given)
- 11 Coordinator of a speech and language unit of two classes (infant and junior). 5-7 years
- 12 No information given
- 13 Teacher in a language unit attached to a mainstream junior school. 7-11 years
- 14 This student did not work as a teacher, although qualified, but was the parent of a 7.6 -year-old boy with a language disability.
- 15 Assistant teacher in a speech and language unit. 5-7 years.
- 16 Teacher in charge of a speech and language unit. 4-11 years.

- 17 Head of a language unit at a mainstream school. 4-10 years.
- 18 No information about work context. 4-11 years
- 19 Support teacher in an 'integrated resource centre' for children with speech and language disorders. 5-8 years
- 20 Acting team leader of a language unit for 5-9 year-olds within a first school. 5-7 years.
- 21 Head of a two-class language unit. 4-11 years
- 22 Head of a speech and language unit. 4-11 years
- 23 Teacher in charge of a language unit based in a mainstream school. 7-11 years.
- 24 Vice principal of a boarding/day school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties with an attached speech and language unit. (No age range given)
- 25 Coordinator for speaking and listening in a primary special educational needs support team. 5-11
- 26 Teacher in a school for children with speech and language disorders. 9-11 years.
- 27 Peripatetic teacher for Learning Support Services (speech and language). (No age range given)

The posts are listed as presented by the respondents so that a distinction is not seen between, for example, language units catering for children with different types of difficulty, such as predominantly expressive or receptive problems. Whilst some of the respondents state that the location of their language unit is a mainstream school, this information is not always provided. Of those providing information, 13 of the teachers were in language units. All of these students taught children in the primary school age range

Six of the respondents taught in special schools catering for children with a variety of special educational needs.

Four teachers described themselves as peripatetic, resource-based or support teachers, visiting pupils in their schools. Although some of these might be expected to be supporting pupils in secondary education, where the information is available, these teachers too worked with primary-age children.